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PRESIDENT MASARYK TELLS HIS STORY

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THE GARDENER'S YEAR

LETTERS FROM SPAIN

LETTERS FROM HOLLAND

# M E T E O R

*by*

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G P PUTNAM'S SONS

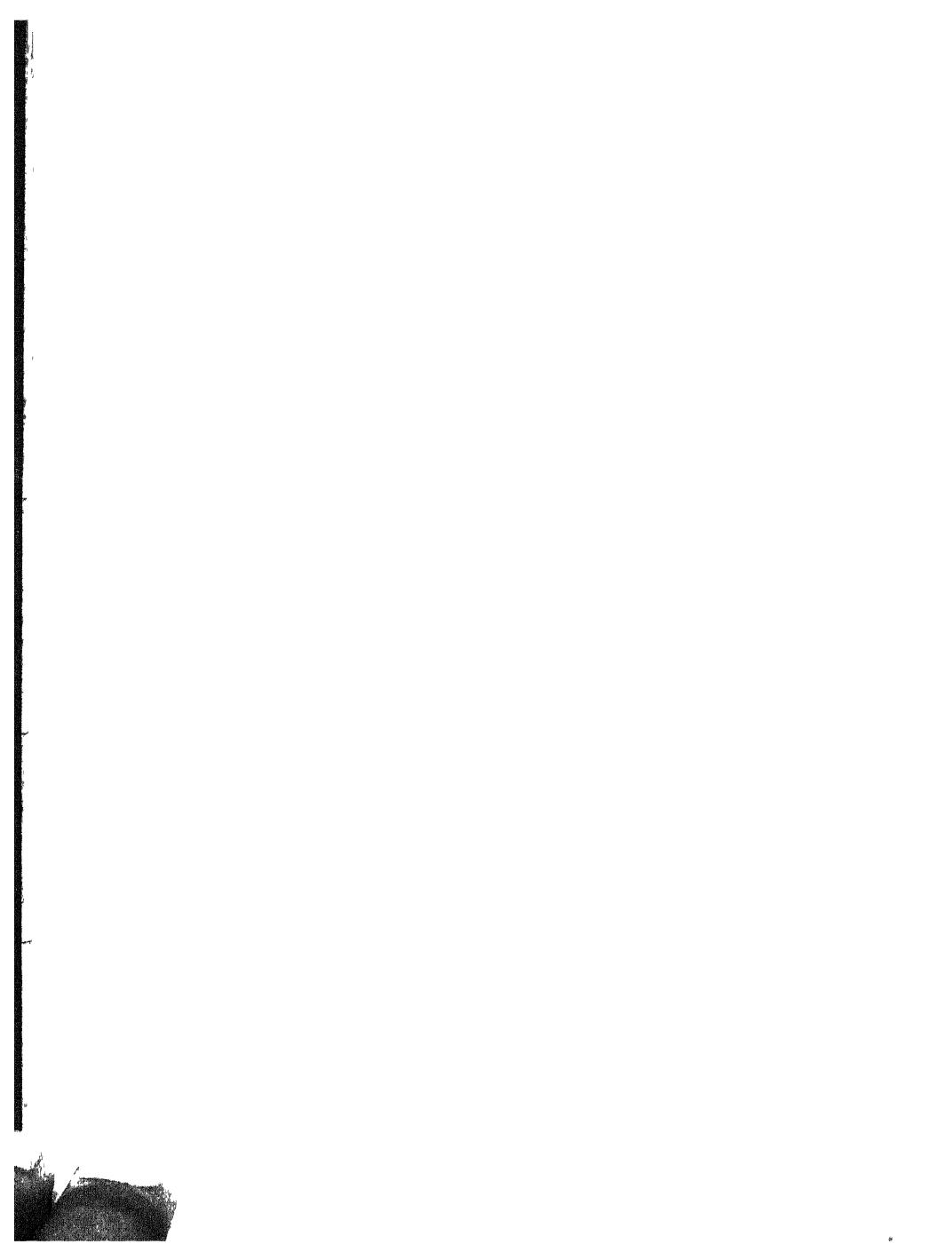
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METEOR



# M E T E O R

## C H A P T E R   I

trees in the hospital garden sway with the gusts  
strong wind. And at each gust they become more  
more worked up, the wind makes them desperate,  
they jostle like a crowd in a panic; now they stop,  
tremble. It did make us run; hush, can you hear  
thing? Yes! run, here it comes again.

the lawn to the ward. Ah, someone is dying, you must go with a professional step that indicates haste, but not excitement. The right thing for a doctor is to go to a call quickly, but quietly and deliberately; so look out, young man, that on the spur of the moment you don't overhurry yourself going to the bed of a dying man. But you, little sister; you run with the light steps of haste in which charitable and official eagerness finds expression, if we take no notice of the fact that with regard to your personal appearance it is very becoming for you. A girl like a peach, they say; too good for a hospital.

So, is that so, a man is dying; in the racket of the wind, during the flight of the terrified trees, someone is dying; they're used to it here, but all the same—Over the white cover a feverish hand wanders. Poor, restless hand, what do you want to clutch? What would you like to throw away? Is there no one to hold you, well I'm here, don't be frightened, don't grope about, there's no dreadful solitude to frighten you. The young doctor bends down, the tufts of his hair fall over his forehead, he takes that groping hand by the wrist and mumbles: Pulse like a thread, *in extremis*; fetch the screen, sister.

But no, we won't set this long-haired, frivolous

fellow by the bed of a dying man, while the organ of the tempest booms, *vox celestis*, *vox angelica*, amid the wailing of the human voice. No, no, sister, this isn't the end, only a fit—let's say, it's something wrong with his heart. This deadly sweat, and feverishness, is only anxiety, he thinks he's suffocating; we'll inject some morphia, and he'll go to sleep.

The poet turned back from the window. "Doctor," he inquired, "what ward is that one opposite?"

"The Medical ward," murmured the surgeon, busy watching the flame of the spirit lamp. "Why?"

"Well, only——" said the poet, again turning to view the crowns of the trees tossing in the wind. So, after all, that nurse is from the Medical ward, and you needn't imagine her lips trembling over the gory butchery of the operating table. Here, take it, sister, and cotton-wool! Cotton-wool!—No, it's not like that; she stands like a log, for she doesn't know much yet; and she only sees the ruffled mane of that fellow in the white coat. It's like this really, it's like this: she's head over heels in love with him, and she has meetings with him in his room. What a guy! How touzled and sure of himself, the braggart! Don't be shy, little girl, nothing will happen; I'm a doctor, and I know all about it.

The poet grew peevish. Oh, we know that; every

fellow has it in him, that frenzy, that agony, when in some desirable woman he recognizes another man's mistress. Let's say sexual envy; let's say jealousy. It may well be that sexual morality is based on this displeasure felt when other people enjoy something together. The wind shows the nice shape of her thighs: that's all. And I—fancy all this twaddle at once. I'm too personal.

Irritable and peevish, the poet looked at the garden tossed by the wind. My God, what empty violence, how depressing the wind is!

"What?" said the surgeon.

"How depressing the wind is."

"It gets on one's nerves," said the surgeon. "Come and have a drink of coffee."

## CHAPTER II

THERE was an aroma of iodoform, coffee, tobacco, and maleness. A good, strong smell, something like a field dressing station. Or perhaps not, wait a bit: a quarantine station. Tobacco from Cuba, coffee from Porto Rico, and wind in Jamaica; stuffy, the wind, and the flurry of the tossing palm trees. Seventeen new cases, doctor, they're dying like flies. Out with the carbolic, quick with the chloride of lime; get a move on, men, and keep a watch on all the roads; nobody must move from here, the plague is on us. Yes, not a single person, till we've all gone under. The poet began to grin. But in that case, doctor, I should have to take the position of responsibility—I, the author. I lead in that battle, an old colonial surgeon, a veteran of plague epidemics, who knows the ropes; and you are my scientific assistant. Or perhaps not, not you, but that hairy fellow from the Medical ward. How are your cultures getting on? The fellow's eyes stick out in terror, the tufts of his hair fall over his forehead. Doctor, doctor, I think I've caught the infection. Well, that will make the eighteenth case; get him to bed. I shall sit up with him to-night, sister. See, see how that girl looks, how she

looks at his hair all clammy with fever! I know she loves him; silly girl, she'd kiss him if I went away —she'll be getting the infection next. How those battered Creodoxas rustle and sigh! Feverish hand, what would you like to clutch? Don't reach after us, we don't know, we can't. Give me your hand, I will take you so that you need not be afraid. Pulse like a thread, *in extremis*; fetch the screen, sister.

"Sugar?" said the surgeon.

The poet tore himself from his brooding. "What?"

In silence the surgeon placed the bowl of sugar in front of him. "I've had lots to do to-day," he said vaguely. "I'm looking forward to the holidays."

"Where shall you go?"

"Shooting."

The poet looked attentively at the taciturn man. "One day you ought to go a long way—for tigers or jaguars. While there are still some left."

"I should like to."

"Listen, doesn't it strike you? Can't you imagine—shall we say, the dawn in the jungle, the warbling of some strange bird, something like a xylophone soaked in oil and rum."

The surgeon shook his head. "I don't imagine anything. I . . . I have to take damned good care to keep

my eyes open. To see, don't you know? And when you're shooting," he added, squinting with his eyes, "you must keep your eyes open too if you want to see properly."

The poet sighed. "Well, you're lucky, my friend. Always when I look I imagine something at the same time. Or rather it's like this: it begins to take shape in my mind by itself, it goes on, and begins to exist as something apart—Of course, I interfere; I advise, improve, and so on, do you understand?"

"And then you write it down," murmured the surgeon.

"No, not at all! Not usually. Such trash. In the short time you were making coffee, two perfectly silly stories took shape like that about your long-haired colleague from the Medical ward. I beg your pardon," he inquired suddenly, "what kind of a man is he?"

The surgeon hesitated. "Well," he said at last, "a bit of a braggart. . . . A big dose of self-conceit—as is usual with young doctors. Otherwise," with the shrug of the shoulders, "I don't know what you would find interesting in him."

The poet could not restrain himself. "Is there anything between him and that little nurse?"

"I don't know," snorted the surgeon. "Is it any business of yours?"

"No," said the poet contritely. "After all, is it any business of mine how things are in reality? My task it to invent, isn't it, to play, pretend—" The poet leaned forward with his heavy shoulders. "That's just the trouble, sir: reality means such a frightful lot to me. That's why I invent it, that's why I always have to invent something to catch hold of it. What I see with my eyes is not enough, I want to see more—and so I invent stories. Please tell me, is there any sense in it? Has it anything to do with life at all? Supposing that just now I'm working on something—

Let's suppose that I'm writing something," repeated the poet after a pause. "I know that it's . . . only a fiction. And I know, my friend, what fiction is, I know how it's done: one part experience, three parts phantasy, two parts logical construction, and the rest artful guile: that it is fresh, that it is topical, that something is being solved or proved in it, and chiefly that it's effective. But one thing is peculiar," the poet burst out, "that all these tricks, all that miserable literary hackwork leaves the man who performs it with an accursed and passionate illusion that it has something to do with reality. Imagine a conjuror who can produce rabbits

from out of a hat, and who really believes at the same time that he does truly and honestly conjure them out of the honest hat. What madness!"

"Something of yours didn't come off, isn't that it?" inquired the surgeon dryly.

"No, it didn't. I was walking along the street one evening, and I heard a woman's voice behind me which said: 'But you won't do that to me, surely.' Nothing else, only those words—perhaps no one even spoke, and it only seemed so to me. You won't do that to me, surely."

"Well, and what next?" asked the surgeon, after a pause.

"What would come next," frowned the poet. "From that . . . a story has grown. That woman was in the right, you understand: a frayed, evil, unhappy woman—And the misery, my friend, in which those people live! But she was in the right; she is the family, the household, she is in a word, order; while he——" He made a gesture with his hand. "A dirty dog, such a blind and physical revolt, a lout, and a brutal fellow——"

"And how did it turn out?"

"What?"

"What was the end of it?" asked the surgeon patiently.

"... I don't know. She ought to have been in the right. In the name of everything in the world, in the name of every law she ought to have been in the right. Do you understand, it all depended on the fact that she was right." The poet began to break up a lump of sugar. "But that fellow took it in his head that he was also in the right. And the more awful and damnable he was, the more he felt that he was right. For it was evident," mumbled the poet, "that he was suffering too, do you understand? There was nothing that could be done; once he began to live in reality, he was not to be ordered about, and he just went his own way, doomed, and inevitable——" The poet shrugged his shoulders. "So you see in the end it was I myself who was that lout, that depraved and desperate wretch; the more he endured, the more it was I—and you call it fiction."

The poet turned towards the window, for there are some things that are more easily spoken into the void. "It won't do, I must get rid of it. I should like to . . . I ought just to play with something . . . with something unreal. That has nothing, nothing, nothing to do with reality . . . or with myself. To be free for once from that terrifying personal experience. Tell me, must I suffer every human agony? Just for once I should like

to invent something very remote, and fantastic—as if I were blowing rainbow bubbles."

The telephone rang. "Well, why don't you do it?" asked the surgeon, lifting the receiver, but he had no time to wait for the answer. "Hello!" he said into the telephone. "Yes, speaking—What?—Oh!—So let them take him to the operating theatre—Of course—I'm coming straight away."

"They've brought someone in," said the surgeon, hanging up the receiver. "He fell from the sky—I mean an aeroplane crashed, and caught fire. What the devil, in such a storm! The pilot is burnt to cinders, they say; and the other—well, a poor wretch." The doctor paused. "I shall have to leave you here. But wait, I'll send you a patient—an interesting case, medically trivial, I only took an abscess from his neck; but the man is a clairvoyant. Strong second-sight, and that sort of thing. But don't you believe him too much." And the surgeon bolted out of the door like a shot, without waiting for the poet's protest.

### CHAPTER III

WELL, so this is the clairvoyant, this pitiable figure in striped pyjamas, with a bandaged neck, and his head on one side, poor devil! It hangs on him as if on a peg, he shuffles to the table, and with cold and trembling fingers lights a cigarette. If at least his eyes were not so close together, and sunken, if only they were not so distracted, if only he would look at things! Good God, nice company the doctor presented me with! What can you talk about with such a spectre? Certainly not about terrestrial things; as everyone knows, it's rather tactless to begin to talk about the latest news with someone from beyond the grave.

"It is a wind out there," said the clairvoyant, and the poet breathed a sigh of relief. May the weather be blessed, for it's a familiar subject with people who have nothing to say to each other. It is a wind out there, he said, and yet it wasn't worth his while to look out through the window at the tragic flight of the trees. Well, a clairvoyant! Why should he look? He fixes his eyes on the tip of his nose, and see, already he knows that the wind is raging outside. Strange

things! You can say what you like, but this is second sight, isn't that right——

What a sight, those two; the poet leaned forward with his heavy shoulders, stuck his chin out, and with tactless curiosity, yes, with a certain amount of hostility, he sized up the bowed head, the thin chest, and the thin, protruding beak of the little man opposite. Was he going to bite him? No, not that, for somehow he felt repelled by him, partly for this and that in his physical appearance, and partly because he was a clairvoyant; as if he were something impure and loathsome. But the other—perhaps he didn't even see; he gazed, without looking, his head to one side, like a bird. And the state between them was cold, tense, and repellent.

"A strong character," murmured the clairvoyant, as if to himself.

"Who?"

"The man they've brought in." The clairvoyant blew out a thick cloud of smoke. "In him there's . . . a frightful intensity, what shall I call it: a flame, fire, heat. . . . Now, of course, it's only a conflagration burning down."

The poet grinned; he could not stand such misplaced bathos.

"So you've already heard of it, too?" he observed.  
"Aeroplane on fire, and so on. . . ."

"An aeroplane?" replied the clairvoyant absent-mindedly. "So that's it, just think of it, he was flying in a wind like this! Like a flaming meteor, about to burst into pieces. Why was he in such a tremendous hurry?" The clairvoyant shook his head. "I don't know, I don't know anything; he's unconscious, and he doesn't know what's happened to him. But even from the sooty fireplace you can judge how far the flame burned up. How deeply it burned! And how the embers still glow!"

The poet snorted with disgust. No, absolutely, I can't stick this morbid dummy. Yes, it was a devil of an ember, if we realize that the pilot got fried to death; and this striped scarecrow here doesn't even say poor fellow. It's true, of course: why had that bolt from the blue to fly in such a wind?

"Strange," murmured the clairvoyant under his breath. "And from such a distance! His way lay across the ocean. Queer how the place where a man was last still sticks to him. The sea has stuck to him."

"By what signs?"

The clairvoyant shrugged his shoulders. "Just the

sea and the distance—There must have been many ways in his life. Do you know where he came from?"

"You ought to be able to tell that yourself," said the poet, as pointedly as he could.

"How can you tell?—He's unconscious, and doesn't know anything. Can you read a closed book? It can be done, but it's difficult, very difficult."

"Reading closed books," murmured the poet. "I'm inclined to think, to say the least, is a waste of time."

"Perhaps it is for you," thought the clairvoyant, squinting in the direction of the corner. "Yes, for you it is futile. You are a poet, aren't you? Be 'thankful that you haven't to think precisely, be thankful that you needn't try to read closed books. Your task is easier."

"Meaning what?" challenged the poet defiantly.

"This and nothing else," said the clairvoyant. "To invent and to perceive are two separate things."

"And of us two, you are the one who perceives, aren't you?"

"A pretty good guess this time," said the clairvoyant, nodding his head as if to punctuate the conversation with his nose.

The poet began to grin. "I should say that we two

don't intend to understand each other, don't you think so? Well, it's true, I only invent things, I imagine what I like, don't I? Just a casual whim——”

“I know,” exclaimed the clairvoyant, interrupting him. You ALSO thought of that man who fell out of the blue. You ALSO imagined the sea behind him. I know. But you hit on the idea only by a kind of conclusion that most of the air lines link up with the ports. A perfectly superficial reason, sir. From the fact that he MIGHT have come from the sea it doesn't follow that he really did come from there. A typical *non sequitur*, sir. It's not permissible to draw conclusions from possibilities. And so that you may know,” he burst out testily, “that man really has got the sea behind him. I know.”

“How?”

“Quite certainly. By the analysis of the impression.”

“You saw him?”

“No. I needn't see a violinist to recognize what he's playing, need I?”

The poet thoughtfully stroked the back of his neck. “The impression of the sea—Perhaps that's because I like the sea. But I'm not thinking of any sea that I've ever seen. I'm imagining a sea warm and thick like oil, and it glistens as if it were greasy. It is all seaweed,

like a meadow. And from time to time something flashes up, and sparkles heavy like quicksilver."

"They are the flying fish," observed the clairvoyant, apropos of something he was thinking of himself.

"Damned man," mumbled the poet, "you're right, they're flying fish."

C H A P T E R   I V

It was a long time before the surgeon returned. At last he came, and murmured absent-mindedly: "Oh, you're still here!"

The clairvoyant with his melancholy nose gazed at some place in the void. "Severe concussion of the brain," he said. "Evidently an internal injury. Fracture of the lower jaw, and of the base of the skull. Superficial and severe burns on the face and hands. Fractura clavicularis."

"Correct," said the surgeon thoughtfully. "He's in a bad way. And how do you know all this, may I ask?"

"You have just been thinking of it," said the clairvoyant, as if by way of apology.

The poet frowned. Go to Jericho, magician, do you think that you impress me? And if you repeat word for word what one is thinking about, don't imagine that I shall believe you.

"And who is he really?" he asked, to change the subject.

"Who knows," muttered the doctor. "All papers on him were burnt. They've found some French, English, and American coins in his pocket, and a Dutch

dubbeltje. Perhaps he flew by way of Rotterdam, but the aeroplane wasn't one of the regular liners."

"Didn't he tell you anything?"

The surgeon shook his head. "Nothing at all. Completely unconscious. I should be astonished if he says anything at all."

The silence became oppressive. The clairvoyant got up, and slouched towards the door. "A closed book, eh?"

The poet frowned after him until he had disappeared down the corridor. "Were you really thinking what he said, doctor?"

"Why, of course. That was the statement that I had just dictated. I don't like this thought-reading. From a medical standpoint," he said thoughtfully. "It's an indiscretion." With this, apparently, he let the matter drop.

"But that's humbug!" the poet burst out indignantly. "It's impossible for one man to know what another thinks! To some extent you can deduce it logically—When you came back I knew at once that you were thinking . . . of that man who fell from the blue. I saw that you were worried, that you were in doubt about something, that it was extremely serious. And I said to myself, wait, perhaps that means an internal injury."

"Why?"

"From reasoning—logical deductions. I know you, doctor, you don't let your mind wander; but when you came back you made motions as if to unbutton your operating coat, although you had already taken it off. From this it was obvious that in your thoughts you were still with your patient. Aha, I said to myself, something is preying on his mind. Perhaps something that he can neither see nor touch—most probably an internal injury."

The surgeon nodded moodily.

"But I looked at you," the poet went on. "That's the whole trick: to observe and deduce—that, at least, is straightforward work. But that magician of yours," he muttered spitefully, "just looks at the tip of his nose, and tells you what you're thinking about. I watched him carefully, he didn't even squint at you. It was . . . disgusting."

And again the only sound was the boooming of the wind. "Even now, doctor, you're thinking about that case. There's something peculiar about him, isn't there?"

"He's got no face," said the surgeon in a low voice. "He's been burned so badly. . . . No face, or name, or consciousness. If only I knew something about him!"

"Or this: why did he fly in such a wind? Where was he so dreadfully keen on going to? What was he afraid of losing? What senseless and impatient motive shot him forth? At any rate, he wasn't afraid of death. I'll pay you, pilot, ten times over if you'll take me where I want to go. If it's a gale from the west, all the better, at least we shall fly faster—And nothing has been found on him . . .?"

The surgeon shook his head. "Well, come, have a look at him, if you can't let the matter drop," he said suddenly, getting up.

The sister of mercy sitting beside the bed rose with difficulty; she had fat, swollen legs, and a flat and colourless face, a weary vessel of charity. The old man on the next bed turned his face away; he was too interested in his own suffering to attempt to bridge the gap that lies between the sick and the healthy.

"He hasn't regained consciousness yet," reported the sister of mercy, folding her hands on her bosom; apparently it should be like that when a nun stands to attention, an old amazon reporting; only her eyes blinked anxiously, with human feeling. The poet remembered the expressive eyes of the monkeys, and felt ashamed. Yes, but these eyes are so unexpectedly and strangely human!

And so this is him, this is the case! With a quivering heart he had prepared himself for a sight from which he would fly in terror, with his hands on his mouth and sobbing with fright; and instead everything was very clean, almost pleasant, nothing but a huge ball of white bandages skilfully applied. Upon my word, a clean job, cleverly done; and it has hands made of cotton-wool, gauze, and calico—big white paws lying on the cover. What a dummy they can make out of nothing but cotton-wool and bandage; you wouldn't even say—

The poet knitted his brows, and gasped. But it breathes; just slightly, those folded white paws rise and fall a tiny bit as if it were alive. And that dark gap here between the bandages is perhaps its mouth; and those dark hollows in the tender little crown of cotton-wool—ah, Lord, no, thank God, they're not blind eyes, they're not human eyes, no, they're only closed eyelids; it would be dreadful if he saw! The poet leaned over the clean bandaging; and suddenly the closed lids flickered. The poet started back, he felt faint and sick. “Doctor,” he gasped, “doctor, won’t he come round?”

“No, he won’t,” said the surgeon thoughtfully, while the sister of mercy blinked her eyes as regularly as water drips. The panic of compassion relaxed; these

two were so calm. Be quiet, be quiet, everything is in order; as regularly as water drips the white sheet over the unconscious man rises and falls. Everything is in order, there is no confusion, or terror, no longer is there any disaster, nobody runs and wrings his hands; even pain is stilled when it becomes a part of order. On the next bed the patient groaned regularly and indifferently.

"Poor fellow," muttered the surgeon, "he's maimed like the Saviour." The sister of mercy crossed herself. The poet would have liked to make the sign of the cross over that bandaged head, but somehow he felt too shy even to do that; he glanced in embarrassment towards the doctor. The surgeon beckoned. "Let's go." And out on tiptoes. There's nothing to talk about now; let the sheet of order and silence close over it, let not that unbroken stillness be disturbed; be quiet, be quiet, as if departing from something strangely and intensely venerable.

Not until they were at the gate of the hospital, where the confusion and noise of life began, did the surgeon remark thoughtfully: "It's strange that so little is known about him. We must register him as Case X." He waved his hand. "You'd better not think about him any longer."

## CHAPTER V

HE has already been unconscious for two days, his temperature is rising, and his pulse grows feebler. Without a doubt life is escaping somewhere; ah, God, what a nuisance! how are we to mend the tear of which we have no knowledge? Well, then, we can do nothing but look at that dumb body with no face, or name, not even palms on which it would be possible to read traces of its past life. If he only had a name, if only, at least, he had some sort of a name, he would not be so—well, what?—disturbing perhaps, or something. Yes, you call it a mystery.

The sister of mercy, it seems, has chosen this hopeless case for the object of her special personal attention; tired and weary she sits on the hard chair at the foot of the bed, which bears above it no written name of a man, but only the Latin names of his wounds, and she never lets her eyes wander from this white, feeble, and faintly breathing chrysalis; apparently she is praying. "Well," mutters the surgeon, without a smile, "a quiet patient, eh? You seem to have taken to him."

The sister of mercy blinked rapidly as if she wanted to defend herself. "But he's so lonely! He hasn't even

got a name——” As if a name were some support to a man. “I dream about him at night,” she said, passing her palm over her eyes. “If he should happen to come round, and wanted to say something—I know that he wants to say something.”

The surgeon was about to say: Sister, this man won’t even say good night to us, but he kept it to himself. Instead, he just lightly patted her shoulder. Here in the hospital one doesn’t squander words of appreciation. The aged nun fished out a big, stiff handkerchief, and blew her nose with emotion. “So that at least he has somebody,” she explained slightly confused—she seemed to fill out with all her care, sitting broader and more patiently than before. Yes, so that at least he’s not so lonely.

That he is not so lonely, yes; but has such a fuss like this with a patient ever been made before? Twenty times a day the surgeon wanders aimlessly down the corridor to have a glance, as if only by the way—Nothing new, sister? No, nothing. Everybody sticks his head into number six; doctors, nurses—Isn’t so-and-so here?—but that’s only an excuse so that for a moment they can stand over that bed without a name, over that man without a face. Poor fellow, they say with their eyes, and go away on tiptoes; and the sister

of mercy rocks slightly, almost imperceptibly at her important and silent post.

And now already it's the third day, all the time deeply unconscious, but the patient's temperature rises above a hundred and four; he is restless, his hands fidget above the cover, and he mutters incoherently. How his body fights for existence; consciousness and will are no longer present to defend themselves, only the heart beats like a weaver's shuttle in a tangled warp; already it runs light, carrying no thread through the texture of life. The machine has ceased to weave, but it stills runs on.

The sister of mercy never takes her eyes from that bed of coma; the surgeon would like to say to her, Well, sister, it's no use, and God knows that it's hopeless for you to sit here, better go and rest. Her eyes blink with apprehension, she certainly has something on the tip of her tongue, but discipline and fatigue close her lips; besides people say little, and talk in a low voice over this bed. "Come to see me afterwards, sister," says the surgeon as he goes on his daily round.

Heavily, like a piece of wood, the sister sits down in the surgeon's room, not knowing how to begin, she keeps her face averted, and emotion brings up red spots on her face. "What is it, sister?" inquires the

surgeon to make it easier for the old woman, as if she were a little girl, and then she bursts out: "I dreamt of him again to-day for the second time."

So now it's out, and the doctor didn't burst into laughter, or say anything that would have confused the sister; on the contrary, he looked at her with eyes full of interest, and waited for her to go on.

"Not that I believe in dreams," she declared self-consciously, "but if on two nights you have a dream which keeps going on, there's something behind it. It's true that sometimes I try to interpret my dreams, but that's only because I'm lonely; I'm not expecting a sign. None of my dreams ever came true, so it's not because I'm superstitious that I'm interested in them. I know that dreams return and repeat themselves; but to keep going on, as reality does, is something different. If there is something in my dream which I ought not to divulge, Mother of God forgive me! I am more accustomed to doctors than to priests, and I will tell you everything as if it were a confession."

The surgeon nodded with understanding.

"I shall tell you everything," the sister continued, "because it concerns your patient; but it will be the main points which I have sorted out and arranged in my mind. When I dreamt it it was mostly in pictures

which were continually changing; some were quite clear, but others were involved, discontinuous, sometimes crowding one on top of the other, sometimes as if several came all at once. At moments it was as if that man was really telling me something, and then again as if I myself were looking at something taking place; it was so confused and puzzling that even in my dream I wished that I could wake, but I couldn't. That dream was so vivid and strong that it went on even in the daytime; but then I could get it into better shape and sequence without those pictures. That wasn't a dream any longer. All things would become mere dreams if there were not some order in them; order is something that only occurs in reality. That is why that dream moved me so much, because I found more order in it than dreams usually have; and I can only tell you what its meaning seems to me now."

#### THE SISTER OF MERCY'S STORY

"Two nights ago he appeared to me for the first time. He was wearing a white suit with brass buttons, leather leggings, and a white helmet on his head; but the helmet was not like an army one, and I have never seen such a dress. His face was as yellow as a gipsy's, and his eyes feverish, something like the eyes of a man

with typhoid fever; he might have had a fever, for he rambled in his talk.

When you dream of someone, you don't hear him speak, nor do you see him move his lips; you just know what he is saying to you, and I never have been able to discover why it is like that. I only know that he spoke to me, that he talked very fast in some foreign language, which I could not understand; I remember that several times he addressed me as 'Sor,' but I don't know what that means. He was agitated, and almost desperate, because I couldn't understand him, and he talked for a long time. But afterwards, as if he had become conscious of where he was, he began to talk—I was going to say, in our language, but that was only because I could suddenly understand it.

'Sister,' he said, 'on my knees, I beg you please, do something for me if you can; for you know what a state I'm in. God. What a misfortune, what a misfortune! I don't even know how it happened; it was as if the earth suddenly flew up against us. If only I could write on the cover with my finger, I'd make it all clear; but you see what I look like.' He showed me his hands, they were not bandaged; but I don't know now why they seemed so dreadful. 'I can't, I can't,' he moaned, 'look at these hands! I'll tell you every-

thing; but for God's sake help me just to get this one thing done. I flew like mad to get everything settled; but suddenly the earth tilted violently, and began to fall on us. I know that something happened; a flame sprang out towards us, such as I have never seen before, and I saw many things; I saw a ship burning, people burning, I saw a whole mountain burning, but I shall not tell you about that; nothing matters any more but just one thing.'

'Just one thing,' he repeated; 'but now I see that it is the whole of life. Ah, sister, didn't they tell you what happened to me? Haven't I been injured in my head? For I've forgotten everything. I only remember my life. I've forgotten everything that I ever did; I can't remember anywhere where I've been, or people's names, and I don't know what my own name is, all that is accidental and of secondary importance. I certainly must have had concussion of the brain if I can't remember anything but what really took place. If they told you my name, you can be certain that it's not my real one; and if I begin to babble something about islands and adventures put it down to my derangement; I do not know to what these ruins belong, and it's no longer possible to make out of them the story of the man. The whole of man is in

what is left for him to accomplish; all the rest is made of bits and fragments which can't be compassed with a glance. Yes, yes, yes, sometimes you dig up something that is past, and think, this is what I am. Only my case is more difficult, sister; something happened that shattered my memory; nothing intact was left in me but what I still wanted to do.' "

## CHAPTER VI

THE sister of mercy swayed slightly as she told her story, with her eyes fixed on the floor, as if she were reciting something that she had learned by heart. "It is strange how such a dream is clear and hazy at the same time, I don't know where we were; he was sitting on some wooden steps, which led up to some kind of a straw hut——" She hesitated for a moment. "Yes, that hut was supported on posts, like the legs of a table; and he was sitting with his legs apart on the lowest step, and he knocked out his pipe on the palm of his hand. His face was lowered, you could only see his white helmet; it looked as if he had his head bandaged.

'You know, sister,' he said, 'I can't remember my mother. Strange, although I never knew her, in my mind something has remained like an empty and blind spot where something ought to be. So you see, my memory was never complete, for there was no mother in it.' He nodded his head as he spoke. 'It was always like an empty spot on the map of my life; I never knew myself completely because I never knew my mother.'

'As for my father,' he went on, 'I must say that our mutual relations were never very good, or intimate. As

a matter of fact there even was between us a silent and unreconcilable hostility. That is, my father was an exceedingly righteous man; he held an important position in his business, and he considered his life fulfilled because in every respect he did his duty. The duty of a man then is to be devoted to his work, to get rich, and on top of that to be respected by his fellow citizens; these are all such big undertakings that they can only be ended by death. He died pompous and tranquil, as if content that that task he had accomplished too. With me he never talked except to admonish, giving himself as an example; most probably he thought of human life as something already complete, like a house that one inherits, or a firm taken over by a successor. He had a very high opinion of himself, his principles, and his virtues, and to him his life seemed to be something worth handing on like a legacy. Perhaps he cared for me in his way, and thought about my future; but he could not imagine a future except as a repetition of his own experiences. For that I hated him so that with all my might I tried to thwart, mischievously and secretly, everything he might have expected from a good and sensible child; I was lazy, obstinate, and wicked, and even as a boy I slept with the servants—I still remember the roughness of their hands; in secret I filled his house with unruly elements,

and I think that I often shook the confidence of the old man; for in me life itself must have appeared as something prodigal and wild over which he had no power.'

'I am not going to describe to you, sister, the life of a young adolescent. Ah, yes, it was all as one would expect, except for this and that I have nothing to feel ashamed of. It's true that I was a naughty and depraved child, but as a youth I was not much different from the rest; just like them I was chiefly full of myself: my loves, my experiences, my views, anything that was mine. Only later a man realizes that these were all not so much his, and his alone, but that they are common experiences through which he had to pass, while all the time he feels that he was the first to discover them. From childhood more stays in one than from adolescence; childhood, yes, that is complete and fresh reality, while youth—God knows where it gets so much of its conceit and unreality; that is why usually it is forgotten and lost. No, thank goodness, it isn't everyone who finds out how he was cheated, and how stupidly he was taken in by life. I have nothing to remember; and when something comes back to me, I feel that it is no longer myself, and that it doesn't concern me.'

'By then I was no longer living with my father; he

was something alien and remote, like no one else, and when I stood by his coffin it was awful and impossible for me to have sprung from this alien body already changed by putrefaction; in no way, in no way could I any longer communicate with the departed, and the tears which rose to my eyes only came from the realization that I was alone.'

'I have perhaps already told you that from my father I inherited quite a large fortune; but even that seemed strange and alien to me, as if it still carried some of the respectability and sense of duty of my father. He built up his estate as something in which he would still live; his money was to have been a continuation of his life and status. I did not like it, and I took my revenge by making use of it only for my laziness and self-indulgence. I did nothing because I was not driven to do anything through necessity; but, please tell me, what reality is it that is not hard and stubborn like stone? I could indulge in all my whims; it is a dreadful bore, sister, and to think out how to kill time is harder work than breaking stones. I was good for nothing, and believe me, a capricious man gets less from life than a beggar.'

He paused a moment, and then said: 'As you see, I certainly have no reason to lament my early life. If

I refer to it now, it is not to drink from the well of youth. I am ashamed that I was young, for through it I wasted my life. It was the silliest and most senseless period of my life; and yet just towards its end I met with an event, of which the import escaped me then. I call it an event, although it was nothing like an adventure; I got to know a girl, and I made up my mind that I would make use of her; it's true that I was in love with her, but even that in youth is nothing extraordinary. God knows she was not my first love, not even the strongest of my passions, the names of which I have already forgotten.' "

## CHAPTER VII

THE sister of mercy shook her head anxiously. "He said all that as if he had something to confess, and it was clear that he did not want to keep anything back from me. He is certainly preparing for death; but for me nothing is left but to pray that God by a miracle, or by grace, will accept this confession made in the dream, and to an unworthy person, as valid; perhaps he will also bear in mind that a man who is unconscious cannot bring himself to the due repentance necessary for perfect penance.

'I must describe to you,' he said later, 'what she was like. Strange: I can't picture her face any longer; she had grey eyes, and a voice rather harsh, like a boy. She also had lost her mother when she was a child; she lived with her father whom she adored because he was a fine old gentleman, and a very noble engineer. To please him, and at her own wish, she studied engineering, and went into a factory; sister, dear sister, I wish that you could imagine her in that workshop of machinery among the steam-hammers, lathes, and half-naked men who pounded at the glowing metal. At that time she was a little girl, an elf, a brave little

creature, and the mechanics adored her; she moved in a world of a strange gentility because she lived among men. Once, yes, once she took me into the workshop, and then I fell in love with her; she was so fragile, so bravely sweet among those strong male backs glistening with sweat, with that small, rather harsh little voice of hers, and with her technical authority over fire, iron, and labour. You might say that this was not a place for a girl; God pardon me for my sins, but it was in that very place that I first felt a desire for her in a tormented and absurd way, in a moment when she was examining her work, scrutinizing it with her long knotted brows. Or again, as she stood with her big father, and he laid his hand on her shoulder as if she were a son of whom he was proud, and upon whom he bestows his work. The workmen called her Mister, and I fixed my eyes on her girlish shoulders tormented by a desire which almost disconcerted me as if there were something unnatural in it.'

'She was immensely happy: happy with the pride of her old father, and of herself, happy because people liked her, and that she was earning her own living, happy with quiet and serene content. Her eyes radiated peace, her boyish voice was low and said little; I loved

the blue-print stains on her hands and fingers. As for me, I was young, and therefore vain, I was a dandy, so of course I gave myself an air of self-assurance; but that girl puzzled me. I thought that she intended to become a sexless being, and out of some kind of spite I made up my mind to humble her as a woman; I thought that if I seduced her I should somehow score over her. Perhaps I felt ashamed before her for myself, for the tedium and triviality of my life, and so, just for that, I wanted to gloat over the glory of a male conquest. You understand that this is how it seems to me now; but then it was only love, desire, a dreadful desire to bend over her, and press from her the sob that she loved me.'

He became serious, and thought for a moment. 'And now, sister, I am coming to things about which it is not easy for me to talk; but I want to tell you everything. It was not a first love, in which no matter how you think, it follows inevitably and almost unaware; I wanted to have her, and I searched for means which would deliver her to me. I am ashamed to remember how stupid and gross, how futile, all those worldly tricks of mine appeared beside the strange and almost rough sincerity and integrity of that virgin girl. I realized that she was above it, and

above me, that she was of finer stuff than I, but it was no longer possible for me to turn back. Men are strange, sister. I was so engrossed with tormenting and vile thoughts of how in some mean way, through a lie, or hypnosis, drugs, or by any other means, I could seduce and dishonour her, as a temple is dishonoured —listen, sister, I am not keeping anything secret from you: I seemed like a devil to myself. And all the time while I was degrading her in my mind, she loved me. Sister, she loved me, and one day she revealed her love to me as simply as a blossom falls from a tree. It was so different—O Lord, it was so different from what I in my passion could imagine. First that alone, that I was as clumsy as a boy who falls in love for the first time.'

He covered his face with his hands as he said that, and became still and silent. 'Yes, I was a pig,' he said afterwards, 'and I deserve everything that came to me afterwards. I was bending over her, lying with closed eyes, and I tried to enjoy to the full my apparent triumph. I should have liked to see the tears well up from under her eyelids, to see her cover her face with shame and despair; but her face was calm and serene, and she breathed like someone asleep. I felt depressed, I wrapped her up, and turned to the window to work

up the devil of my pride. When I turned back she looked at me with full and clear eyes, and she smiled as she said: "Well, now I belong to you!"

'I was horrified—yes, I was horrified with astonishment and humiliation. There was in her so much light, clarity, transparency, I don't know what to call it. Just simply—Now I belong to you, and everything is all right; here we've got it, here we are, and nothing can be done about it. What a relief, how clear it was, what a simple and tremendous solution. Yes, it was solved, and with the most definite certainty, and the most complete fullness; this sensible little maid spoke with assurance and without hesitation. Well, now I belong to you. Think how proud she was, how satisfied with herself because she had found this holy, this bright, and certain living truth; her eyes were still wide open with that astonishing and tremendous discovery, and she became filled with the great peace of something decided for ever. The same small features which for a few seconds were broken with confusion and pain now took on a new and final expression—the expression I should say of a man who has found himself. Yes, now I know what I am. I belong to you, and what has occurred was in order, and the order of things has been accomplished. As when water closes

over the ripples, becomes smooth again, and you can see the bottom.'

'Sister, I'm not keeping anything back from you. If she had dug her hands into my eyes, if she had been shaken with sobs, if anything of her had cried out with reproof, What have you done to me, you vile person? I should have felt nothing but delight in victory. A delight both bad and good, pride, magnanimity, and repentance, what do I know; I should perhaps have fallen on my knees, vowing an oath, and kissing her hands, stained with red lead and pencils. But this victory was not for me; for me was only the confusion, and shame, into which I began to fall. I tried to stammer something about love; she raised her brows as if in astonishment. Why talk about that, need we yet? I belong to you, and this means everything, love, acquiescence, reality, yes it means everything. It would be vulgar and immodest to prattle of sentiment and gratitude. What's the good of talking? It has happened, I am yours; and if you have still to talk, it would be as if there were something here that needed explaining away. Ah, sister, sister, don't you understand how wise and mature that was, how dignified and pure! Isn't it as if I had intended to sin, and she had made a sacrament of it? What shame, I did not know what

to say; she looked at my rooms with interest, as if she were seeing them for the first time, and she hummed a little tune to herself, she who never sang. She did not actually say so, but she just felt at home, that she belonged there.'

'She smiled, and sat down beside me, and with her small and rather harsh voice she spoke—not of the present, or the future, but of herself, of her childhood, of the affections of a girl; she was giving me her past, as if it all ought to belong to me. I could not get rid of a strange feeling of humiliation and inferiority; I wanted to embrace her again, but she just raised her hand—that alone was sufficient for her defence. No, she said without embarrassment, let us wait. Everything was so simple and matter-of-fact. If I belong to you, it is no folly, but a real thing, lasting, and valid. She kissed me on the mouth, as if to say, don't frown, little one, as if she were my mother, as if she were older and stronger than I, and more mature—It was almost unbearably sweet, and at the same time, God forgive me, as humiliating as a blow.'

'Then she left me—you know that, sister, the heaviest step is going away. In the way in which a man walks away he reflects his embarrassment, incertitude, rashness, self-assurance, frivolity, or vanity.

Mind your back, for we are not protected when we go away. I don't know how she went away. She stood in the door with her head slightly lowered, and then she vanished. So lightly and silently. This is important because that is how I saw her for the last time.'

'For that same night I ran away like a scamp.' "

C H A P T E R   V I I I

THE sister of mercy blew loudly and indignantly into her stiff handkerchief, and continued: "That is what he told me. His act was abominable, and it seems as if he is sorry for it; but I must say that he ought not to exculpate so completely the girl, who, as he says, had given herself of her own will. Even if, according to his description, she was gentle and sweet, she deserved the punishment that fell upon her, and we might say that to some extent that man was God's instrument; but that does not mitigate his guilt.

'When I think now,' he said afterward, 'of the strange motives which led to my flight, I see them in a different light to what I did then. At that time I was young, and I had a number of more or less adventurous and hazy plans; besides that I still had in me, from my childhood, a feeling of revolt against any kind of duty. There was in me a violent, anxious aversion to anything which would bind me, and this cowardice I felt to be the expression of my liberty. The depth and fixity of her love terrified me; although she stood above me, I was frightened that I should be bound for ever.

I felt that I must decide between myself and her, and I decided for myself.'

'Now I know more, and I see things in a different light. Now I know that she was more complete than I, that everything was decided in her, and nothing in me, that she was mature, while I was still a confused, adolescent, irresponsible boy. What I felt in myself to be a revolt against entanglements was the fear of her superiority, the fear of that great certainty. The virtue of belonging to someone was not given to me, I could not say: I belong to you too, just as you see me here, unchangeable, complete, and final. There was not in me the fullness of a man that I could give to her. I can go through it with you without emotion as if it were a bill, but I can talk like this because it is the ledger of my life. Debit, credit. She gave me herself; she said: Well, now I belong to you. And I—everything I had was love, was passion, a doubtful promise, something like an unsigned cheque.' He laughed quietly. 'For I am a man of business, sister, and I should like to get my accounts in order. My flight, you know, was the flight of an insolvent debtor. I owed her myself.'

It seemed to me (said the sister of mercy) that he was grinning as if he was jeering at me; I tried to speak, but then he grinned still more, and began to disappear.

With an effort I tore myself from my sleep, disturbed with such a vivid dream. I prayed for him and for the girl, and I tell you the whole day long it stuck in my head. The following night I lay awake for a long time, but as soon as sleep came over me he was already there as if he had been waiting for it. Again he was sitting on the steps with a lowered head; he seemed sad and uneasy. Behind the cottage a field was waving in the wind, grown over with something that looked like maize, or reeds in a swamp.

'It's not maize,' he said suddenly, 'it's sugar-cane. It seems that I have been buying cane on the islands for many years, and getting rum out of it, aquardiente, as they call it there, but that it not the point. In reality I was nothing more than an immature boy who had run away into the world. I feel annoyed for having described it to you in a not very suitable manner, and it is worth while for me to correct your unfavourable impression. Yes, for instance, I know that to a certain extent you condemn that girl; in what I told you about her behaviour you are inclined to see weakness towards temptation and sinful satisfaction of the flesh. If that were so, then what I took to be her tremendous honesty, and patience of perfect love, was only the illusion of a young enamoured man; but then, sister,

that perfect love must have been in me, without my knowing it, and my flight would have been sheer madness. It would have been unintelligible, and unintelligible my whole life would have remained. I know, this is what is called an indirect proof. You can object that life is meaningless, and inexplicable, but I see that you do not think that it is.

'I have another indirect proof that what I have described to you is correct. It is the life which I led myself after that strange flight. By this flight I must have committed something extremely cowardly; I must have violated some mystic order, for ever since then a curse had been lying on me. By that I do not mean the troubles that I had to face, but that from that time on I had neither stability nor fixity in anything. I tell you, sister, that after that I lived a bad life: the life of a man who is unforgiven. I use your words to express it, for I am too much a man of the world, and I should say that I lived like a piggish prodigal, a lost hound, a deceitful rogue, and God knows what else, miserable and inconstant, you can imagine: and all because at a certain point I failed dismally. I was too empty, flimsy, and green to be able to face when I met it all of a sudden the fullness of life, yes, how shall I describe it; I have in my mind something that means order and

persistence, achievement, value, the peace of something complete for ever. If genuine reality is something which is, and which therefore endures, then I ran away from reality; it was an accursed flight for I never found it again. You can't realize, sister, how frail and ephemeral is all evil; it must perpetually renew itself, but in vain; in baseness a man does not fulfil himself, and the blasphemer, murderer, the jealous, and the rake live lives that are strangely fragmentary and unsettled. Ah, I can't piece together all my life; it is all chips, rubble, and scraps, which won't fit together to form any picture. In vain, in vain I struggle with my petty and sinful acts; they are incoherent and confused, nothing but broken threads and chaos, without head or tail. That's how it is, that's how it is, amen, and you call it a bad conscience.

'I can show you my pockets; they used to be crammed with gold. I can bare my shoulders; they bear the marks of the lash of a whip and of the teeth of mulattos. Feel here; my liver is hard and swollen with heavy drinking. Once red fever got me, and another time they hunted me with guns like a deserter. I could tell you of fifty lives, and they are all false; only their scars are left now. This is the hut where I lay, on the point of death, and abandoned like a sick cat; I went

over my different lives, and I could not get them all straight; I think I must have invented them during my fever, they were only vile and awful dreams. Twenty years or so, and only muddled, senseless, fleeting dreams. Then they took me to the hospital, and nurses in white aprons cooled me with ice. God, how good it was, how cool it was, poultices and white aprons, and all that—you know, somehow as if I mattered; but death had already entered me.'

## C H A P T E R   I X

"I SHOULD say, God's finger," remarked the sister of mercy. "Illness is a warning, and the Church does wisely in sending its servants to the beds of the sick, to point the way at that cross-road. But in these days people are too much afraid of illness and death, and because of that they cannot recognize that warning, and they cannot read *mene tekel* when it is written with the fiery hand of pain.

'Death entered me then,' he said. 'They got me past the worst, but I lay stretched out, as weak as a fly. I can't say that I was afraid of death; I was amazed that I was able, that I could die at all, that is, go through so serious and far-reaching an experience; I faced it like a task I wasn't fitted for. I felt as if I were being asked to do something too great, important, and decisive for me, and as if it were hopeless to try to object that I was not ready for it; and I felt a kind of tremendous uncertainty or anxiety. Strange, before that I had faced death so many times, and God knows my life was active, and often dangerous enough; but until then Davy Jones had only been for me a matter of risk or chance, I could laugh at him, or defy him, but now he

seemed to be something inexorable, and, like some solution, inexplicable, but supremely valid, and final. Sometimes weakness and indifference gained the upper hand, and then I said to him, Well, all right, I shall close my eyes, and you get it done, but quick; I don't want to know anything. But at other times I was angry at my childish cowardice. But it's nothing, I said to myself, it's nothing very hard, it's only the end. Every adventure has its end, and this will only be one more. But strange enough, however much I thought about it I could not think of death as an end, snip, like cutting a thread. I looked at it then from close enough, and it seemed to me to be something vast and enduring; I can't say what, but a tremendous space in time, for death is lasting. I will tell you, it was this very permanence that frightened me so terribly; I despaired of being equal to it, for I had never undertaken anything permanent, and I never signed a contract that would bind me for any length of time. I had had plenty of opportunities to settle down and live respectably without any great effort, but every time I was filled with violent and overwhelming loathing; I took it to be part of my character that needed change, moods, and adventure. And now, now I had to meet this contract for eternity; I was soaking with cold sweat, and I gasped with

terror. But it's impossible, it's not for me, it's not for me, God in Heaven, help me, for I'm not ready yet to decide for ever. Ah, yes, if, say, you could make an experiment with death for three months, for half a year —well, here's my hand; but don't ask me to say to you: Well, now I belong to you.'

'And this, sister, was like lightning, or revelation. Again I saw that girl as she lay full of certainty and joy, as she said quietly: Well, now I belong to you. And again I stood puny and humiliated before that courage to live while I fluttered ridiculously before the decision to die. And I began to understand that life like death has the elements of permanence, that in its way, and with its own small means, it has the will and the courage to last for ever. And these are the two parts which mutually complete and fit into each other. Yes, it's like that: only a fragmentary and casual life is swallowed up by death, while that which is complete and real attains its fulfilment. Two parts which fit together into eternity. Because I was delirious, it seemed to me to be like two hemispheres which ought to be put together, but the one was chipped and bent, a mere crock, and however much I tried it would not fit into the other one which, so perfect and smooth, was death. I must mend it, I kept saying to myself,

so that the two will fit together: Well, now I belong to you.'

'After that, sister, I invented a life for myself. I say invented because much of it could not be pieced together, and had to be thrown away, while on the other side solid and complementary things were missing. With my youth there would also have been much to correct, but I did not bother myself with that much; the most important was, then, and still is, that in that real reality, that is in that that was not, and yet somehow did exist, not as a fact, but as a meaning—like a leaf torn from a book—God, what did I want to say? —that's owing to the fever. Yes, the most important thing is that in that real reality the things were different, quite different, do you understand? That is, they ought to have been different, that was essential; and that real story, as it really ought to have been, is—is—' His teeth chattered, but he controlled himself with an effort, 'You know, as I told you,' he chattered, 'as I told you, she was lying—and she said: "Well, now I belong to you." That is holy truth, sister, but what followed, what followed ought to have been different. Now I know because death and life have entered me. I ought to have said, You, yes, I should have said, that's it, thank God; You belong to me, and you will wait, wait, till

I come back with life and death in my body. Don't you see that I'm not complete enough to live. I am not yet complete enough to endure, not brave enough to decide, not of one piece like you, like you. I ask you, what would you do with a heap like me? But I don't know myself what I shall become, I don't know where is my head and tail. As for you, you are eternal, you know everything that is to be known, you know that you belong; but I——'

A tremor ran through the whole of his body as he said this. 'Wait, I shall also come, and say: Well, now I belong to you. Ah, sister, do you understand, she knew it, she realized that even although I didn't say so. And so she said: No, wait till another time. That means that I am to return, doesn't it? Say, say yourself, that means that she will be waiting for me, doesn't it? And that's why she did not say even goodbye, that's why I didn't see her go away. I shall return, and both halves, like life and death, will fall into each other; well, now I belong to you. There is no proper and complete reality but what it is to be.' He sighed deeply, like a man with great relief. 'Love, death, life, everything that is in me, inevitable, and absolute, will all fall together into one another. Here you have me, only now am I in my true place; the only certain thing is

to belong. Myself, my whole self I have found in that now I belong to somebody. Thank God, thank God, at last I have arrived.

'No, let me go, I can't wait, I'm going back. And she will only smile, Well, now I belong to you; I shall not be afraid any more, I shall not cover her over, I'm coming now, I'm coming now, I know that she's already tugging at the tapes and clasps of her dress. Do, quick, you know that I am to go back! You call this a storm? —get away, I know a hurricane when I see one, I have seen tornadoes and water-spouts; this breeze is not fresh enough to carry me. Don't you see, she flies into my arms, she bends forward, and flies, look out, we shall dash our heads together, and teeth, look out, you're falling on me, I shall fall on you, how passionate you are, how you snatch me into your arms!' Suddenly he began to wander feverishly. 'Why is that pilot flying into empty space? Sister, tell him that it's not there, tell him to come back! Or no, go to her, and tell her, let her know that I'm coming back! Don't you know that she's waiting! For God's sake, please tell her that I'm on the way, just till that pilot can find where to land; I couldn't write to her, I don't know where she is——' He raised his eyes, desperate and full of terror. 'What—what do you—Why don't you tell her?

I must fly round, always round and round; and you only blink at me, and you don't want to tell anything, because——' Suddenly he began to change, on his head he had a mask of bandages, and he trembled frightfully; and I realized that he was scoffing at me. 'I know, you are an evil, envious, nasty nun; you are incensed with her because she loved. You needn't envy her; well, to tell you the truth, then even in that I lied a bit. Because of that, perhaps, do you see, I behaved so cowardly. So that you know, another time——'"

The sister of mercy sat still with quiet sad eyes. "Then he cursed and swore; it was as if Satan were talking in him. He vomited abuse and insults—God be merciful to me." She crossed herself. "The most terrible was that those words came from a chrysalis without either mouth or eyes. I was so frightened that I woke up. I know I should have taken my rosary to pray for his soul; but instead I went into number six to take his temperature. He was lying unconscious, a hundred and four point five, and he shook with fever."

## C H A P T E R X

Now he was only a hundred and one point six; he mumbled in his sleep, and his bandaged hands moved restlessly over the blanket. "Do you know, sister, what he says?" asked the surgeon. The sister of mercy shook her head, with her lips tightly pressed together.

"He says 'Yes'r,'" burst out the little man on the next bed. "'Yes'r,' he says, 'Yes'r.'"

Yes, sir, guessed the surgeon. Well, English then.

"And said 'Mañana,'" the little old man remembered.  
"Mañaña, or mañana."

The old man crowed hoarsely. "Mañaña. Mañaña.  
Like a baby in swaddling clothes."

Somehow it struck him as extremely funny, he choked with laughter until he shook again, they had to make him be quiet.

And up till then no fresh information as to who he really was. Three times a day the poet rang up on the phone: "Hello, do you know anything further yet?"

"No, we don't know anything." And—"Please tell me how he is."—Well, you can't shrug your shoulders through the phone—"He's still alive."

During the afternoon his temperature fell further, but the patient (at least, what could be seen of him) seemed yellower than before, and began to hiccup. That points to some injury to the liver—or does it look like icterus; the surgeon grew doubtful, and for a second opinion he called in a famous visceral specialist.

The specialist was cheerful and pink, and an eminent old man, full of talk; he was so pleased that it was a wonder that he didn't embrace the sister of mercy, "Yes, yes, we two had some cases through our hands before they made a surgeon of you, eh?"

In a low voice, and more or less in Latin, the surgeon explained the case. The specialist blinked through his gold-rimmed spectacles at the figure made up of cotton-wool and bandages. "God bless you," he exclaimed with feeling, and he sat down on the side of the bed. The sister of mercy silently removed the cover. The specialist sniffed and raised his eyes. "Sugar?"

"How do you know?" muttered the surgeon, "I had his water examined, of course . . . if there's no blood. Besides other things they did find sugar. You recognize it by the smell?"

"I'm not often mistaken," said the specialist. "You can tell acetone. Dear me, our *ars medica* is 50 per cent intuition."

"I don't put much on that," opined the surgeon. "I only . . . when I see someone for the first time I have a feeling at once: I shouldn't like to operate on this case, not even if it were only for corns. Something would go wrong with him, embolus, or something. But why—that I don't know."

The specialist gently passed his hands and fingers over the body of the unconscious man. "I should like to examine him," he said regretfully, "but we must leave him in peace, I suppose?" He carefully, almost tenderly, laid his pink ear on the patient's chest, his glasses pushed up onto his forehead. Silence followed, even a fly could be heard at the window. At last the specialist straightened himself up. "But his heart has had some wear," he muttered. "It could tell some stories. And his right lung isn't all right. Distended liver——"

"Why is he so yellow?" burst out the surgeon rather rashly.

"I should like to know that myself," said the specialist thoughtfully. "And his temperature has fallen so much, you say—Show me his water, sister." The sister silently handed him the tube: it had in it a few drops of thick brownish water. "I say," said the specialist, raising his eyebrows. "Where did you get him from? Ah, so you

don't know where he was coming from when he fell out of the sky to you. Hadn't he got tremors when they brought him to you."

"He had," said the sister.

It seemed as if the specialist was counting up to five. "Five, at most six days." he murmured. "That's hardly possible. He might get here . . . from the West Indies . . . say, in five or six days?"

"Hardly," remarked the surgeon. "Almost impossible. Unless he came over the Canary Islands, or somehow by that way."

"So it's not impossible," remarked the specialist caustically. "Or where else could he get amaril fever?" (He pronounced amaril as if he were enjoying the taste of the word.)

"Where could he get what?" asked the surgeon, failing to catch his meaning.

"Typhus icteroides. Yellow fever. In all my life I've only seen one case before, that was thirty years ago, in America. Now he has got to the period of calm and is getting to the yellow stage."

The surgeon did not appear to be convinced. "Listen," he said dubiously, "mighthn't it be Weil's disease?"

"Bravo, doctor," said the specialist. "It might. Do

you want us to try it on guinea-pigs? That would be something for my hairy assistant; he's quite mad about tormenting guinea-pigs. If the guinea-pig keeps alive and well, then I'm right. And I should say," he added modestly, "that I am right."

"How do you know?"

The specialist made a gesture with his arms. "Intuition, my friend. To-morrow his temperature will go up, and he will develop black vomit. By all means I shall send that fellow here to make a blood smear for us."

The surgeon scratched his head in embarrassment; "And . . . listen, what is that red fever?"

"Red fever? Ah, *fièvre rouge*. That's the Antilles fever."

"Only in the Antilles!"

"The Antilles, West Indies, the Amazon. Why?"

"Only, well," mumbled the surgeon, looking uncertainly at the sister of mercy. "But yellow fever also occurs in Africa, doesn't it?"

"In Nigeria, and such places, but it's not indigenous there. When anyone says yellow fever, I think of Haiti, or Panama—just like a landscape, palms, and all that."

"But how could he get as far as here with it?"

wondered the surgeon anxiously. "The incubation lasts five days, doesn't it? And in five days—Then he must have flown all the way."

"Well, so he did," replied the specialist as if that were nothing nowadays. "He must have been in a tremendous hurry. The devil only knows why he went at such a pace." He drummed quickly with his fingers on the bed-post. "I don't think he'll tell you much about what was driving him so hard. His heart is very bad, and he's gone through a lot."

The surgeon nodded slightly, and sent the sister of mercy away with a glance. "I'll show you something," he said, as he uncovered the thighs of the unconscious man. Right on the groin in a semicircle there were four hard white scars, and one long one like a scratch. "You can feel how deep these scars go into the flesh," he said. "I've always wondered what could have made them—"

"Well, and?"

"If he'd been in the tropics it might have been a paw—a cat's paw. See how hard the claws clutched. But a tiger's paw would have been bigger; perhaps a jaguar—that would mean America."

"So you see," said the specialist, and blew victoriously into his handkerchief. "Here you have a nice piece of

biography already. *Locus*: West Indies. *Curriculum vitae*: hunter and adventurer——”

“And a sailor as well. On his left wrist, under the bandage, he's got an anchor tattooed. By origin from the so-called better classes; comparatively long narrow feet——”

“By the body altogether, intelligent, I should say. *Anamnesis*: drinker, obviously alcoholic. An old lung trouble which broke out again some time ago, perhaps as the result of some fever. And you see red fever fits exactly.” The specialist's eyes shone with pleasure. “And the scars of tropical framboesia. Ah, my friend, that nearly takes me back to the days of my youth. Far countries, Red Indians, jaguars, poisoned arrows, and such like things! What a story! A globe-trotter who goes to the West Indies—why? Apparently without any object, if we are to judge by the luggage labels of life. He leads a strange and restless existence, for his age his heart is terribly exhausted; he drinks from despair and owing to the thirst of diabetes—Man, I can almost see that life.” The old gentleman thoughtfully scratched the tip of his nose. “And then that strange, headlong return, that mad chase after something—and somewhere before the goal he dies of yellow fever, which a miserable tiny *Stegomyia fasciata*

squirted into him almost the last day of his wanderings there."

The surgeon shook his head. "He will die of concussion, and internal injuries. Leave him to me."

"Yellow fever is not so common with us," protested the specialist. "Don't grudge him a famous exit, let him go from this world like a unique and remarkable case. With that bandaged head of his, with no face and no name, doesn't he look like a mask to represent mystery?" The specialist gently covered the unconscious body. "Poor chap, you will tell us something or other when we have a look inside you; but then the story of your life will be already over."

## CHAPTER XI

IN the morning his temperature rose, about a hundred and one, and the bandages round his mouth were stained dark as if from vomited blood. The patient was yellow, according to rule, and as one says, was clearly sinking. "Well, what?" inquired the surgeon of the sister of mercy, "Nothing last night—you haven't dreamt of him again?"

The sister of mercy shook her head quickly. "No, I prayed, and it helped." And then she added, frowning, "Besides, to make sure, I took three doses of bromide."

Then another nurse appeared and announced that the patient in the general ward, the one with that abscess on his neck was feverish, and hiccupped, he wouldn't say anything, and was getting weaker. Mumbling and upset, the surgeon rushed to the clairvoyant's room so fast that the tails of his white coat flapped behind him. The clairvoyant was lying with closed eyes, and his thin nose pointing pathetically at the ceiling.

"What business have you to get fever," shouted the surgeon. "Let me see." His temperature was about a hundred and one. Annoyed, the surgeon undid the

bandage, but the wound was clean and nice, with no inflammation round it. And, altogether, there was nothing to show, only rather yellowish eyes, and the hiccup. The surgeon strolled along the corridor and dropped back again into number six; there bending over the bed of Case X the famous specialist was standing, surrounded by four young doctors in white coats, and announced, "Amaril fever," as if fondling the word. "My friend," he said, turning to the surgeon, "nothing can be done, you must let us visceral experts have this patient a bit. Such a rare, and beautiful case! Wait, the whole faculty will come to you here, with all the scientific luminaries; at least you ought to let him have a canopy over his bed, and an inscription crowned with laurels, 'Welcome to you,' or something like that." He blew into his handkerchief as if it were a war-trumpet. "With your leave we should like to take a small sample of his blood. Secundarius tell the assistant to take from the patient a sample of blood." When passing down the ranks, the message reached the assistant who stood at the left elbow of the great specialist, this long, hairy fellow bent over the fore-arm of the unconscious patient and wiped it with a swab of cotton.

"When you have finished," murmured the surgeon

to the specialist, "I should like to speak to you for a moment." But the old doctor could not lose so quickly his enthusiasm for the yellow fever, and he was still talking of it when the surgeon hauled him into the clairvoyant's room. "Well," announced the surgeon, "now tell me what's the matter with this one." The old gentleman snorted, and went for the patient with all the quick demands, and silent touches of his art. Breathe out, hold your breath, breathe out deeply, lie down. tell me if it hurts, and such familiar things. At last he stopped, doubtfully rubbed the tip of his nose, and looked suspiciously at the clairvoyant. "What can be the matter with him?" he said. "There's nothing amiss, that's quite clear. Very neurotic," he said peremptorily. "But what's behind that fever beats me."

"So you see," thundered the surgeon at the clairvoyant. "Now my man, tell us what you really think you're up to."

"Nothing," the clairvoyant made an effort to deny. "That's to say, it may have some connection with that case, don't you think so?"

"With what case?"

"With that man from the aeroplane. For he's in my mind all the time . . . Has he got fever again?"

"Have you seen him?"

"No, I haven't," mumbled the clairvoyant. "But I keep thinking of him . . . that is, I concentrate on him. You know what an experience that is. It exhausts me terribly."

"He's a clairvoyant, you know," remarked the surgeon quickly. "And you had no fever yesterday."

"I had," admitted the clairvoyant, "but . . . I kept it down from time to time, and my temperature went down. You can control that by your will."

The surgeon looked questioningly at the coryphaeus of abdominal medicine, but the latter rubbed his beard, and meditated. "And what pains?" he asked suddenly. "Didn't you feel any pains? I mean the pains that that other one has."

"I had," said the clairvoyant rather timidly and unwillingly. "That is, they were purely mental pains, even although they were localized in certain parts of my body. It is so difficult to say exactly," he apologized shyly. "I should call them mental pains."

"Where?" let fly the specialist.

"Here," pointed the clairvoyant.

"Aha, in the upper part of the abdomen. Right," muttered the specialist with satisfaction. "And here in the diaphragm?"

"Such a heavy pressure and a feeling as if I were sick."

"Quite right." The specialist felt pleased. "Nothing else?"

"An awful headache, here at the back—and in my back. As if I were broken in two."

"*Coup de barre*," crowed the old doctor. "Man, that's a *coup de barre*. You've hit on it perfectly! That's yellow fever, just as it is in the book."

The clairvoyant grew frightened. "But then . . . Do you think that I can get it?"

"Not at all," grinned the specialist. "You needn't worry, we haven't the right gnat here. Only suggestion," he replied to the questioning look of the surgeon, evidently feeling that with that word the matter had been solved to his complete satisfaction. "Suggestion. I shouldn't be surprised if he hadn't a bit of albumen and blood in his water. With neurotics," he said, "you mustn't be astonished at anything; they know some dodges—Turn to the light."

"But then my eyes run so," complained the clairvoyant. "I can't bear the light."

"All right, my man," said the specialist approvingly. "A perfect clinical picture, my friend. You are a complete diagnostic treasure, and you can observe things nicely.

I mean observe yourself. You would be a good patient. You wouldn't believe how some people are incapable of explaining what hurts them."

The clairvoyant was clearly flattered by this praise. "And here, doctor," he pointed shyly, "I feel such a strange anxiety."

"Epigastrium," said the specialist approvingly, as if he were examining a diligent medical student. "Excellent."

"And in my mouth," recalled the clairvoyant, "a feeling as if everything was swollen up."

The old gentleman trumpeted victoriously and magnificently. "So you see," he announced to the surgeon, "here we've got together all the symptoms of yellow fever. My diagnosis is being confirmed. And when I think," he added sentimentally, "that for thirty years I haven't seen a case of yellow fever . . . Thirty years is a long time."

The surgeon felt less happy, and frowned at the clairvoyant, who was resting prostrate and exhausted. "But these experiments don't do you any good," he lectured severely. "I shall not let you stay here, off you go home. You might suggest for yourself illnesses from the whole hospital. In short, pack up your tooth-brush and——" with his thumb he indicated the door.

The clairvoyant nodded gloomily in agreement. "I couldn't stand it," he admitted in a low voice. "I can't imagine why it exhausts one mentally. If he . . . that one, that X case, were conscious, then everything would be recognized clearly, definitely, and . . . as if it were in black and white. But with such complete unconsciousness." The clairvoyant shook his head. "A terrible, almost hopeless task. Nothing at all definite, no outline—" He made a gesture in the air with his thin fingers. "And besides those fevers of his, such a muddle even in the subconscious—all upside down, and incoherent. At the same time, everybody was—and is full of him here, everybody thinks about him, you, nurses, everyone."

On the clairvoyant's face the signs of a deep and intense agony appeared. "I must get away from here, or I shall go mad."

The specialist listened with interest, with his head to one side. "And," he inquired vaguely, "have you found out anything about him?"

The clairvoyant sat up and with trembling fingers began to light a cigarette. "Anything." He blew out smoke with relief. "In anything I find there are always gaps and uncertainties." He waved his hand. "To find out, that is to hit at some mystery. If you want to know

if I have come across problems and uncertainties, then, yes; then I have found something out. I know you would like me to tell you, but you don't like to ask."

He thought for a moment with closed eyes. "And I want to get rid of it. If I get it off my chest I shall be able to get away from it—to leave it alone as you would say. You never get rid of anything you keep silent."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CLAIRVOYANT'S STORY

THE clairvoyant sat up on the bed, with his thin knees drawn up to his chin, gaunt and grotesque in his striped pyjamas, and looked into the void as if he were squinting. "I'd better outline to you the method, and introduce some notions," he began hesitatingly. "Let's say, imagine a circle—a circle of brass wire." Here he drew a circle in the air. "A circle is a visible thing. We can think of it abstractly, we can define it mathematically, but psychologically a circle is something that we SEE. If I blindfolded you, you could touch that wire, and you would say that it is a circle. You would have the SENSATION of a circle. And there are people who with closed eyes can discern with the ear what form the body has that is vibrating. In our case they would HEAR a circle if we hit that wire with a mallet. And if an intelligent fly wandered over that wire it would also acquire an absolutely definite SENSATION OF A CIRCLE. You must understand what a small step it is from these physical sensations to the mental state of a man who in complete darkness would have a sensation

that somewhere here there is a circle. Without the aid of eyes, ears, or touch. A perfectly accurate sensation of a circle. I tell you that with the senses eliminated like this you would have a far stronger consciousness of the circle than of the material of which it is made; for form and not material is the spiritual medium. And if I say sensation, I don't mean some intuition, or guess, but an extremely accurate, penetrating, I might say painfully definite consciousness of something; but to give this unconsciousness a name, and express it as a part of knowledge is difficult, extremely difficult."

The clairvoyant stopped short. "Why," he mumbled, "why, indeed, have I taken a circle for an example? You see, I anticipated before I actually began. The feeling of a circle which closes in on itself. The shape of a tropic, and at the same time the shape of life." He shook his head in negation. "No, in this way we should not get anywhere. I know you both have your doubts about telepathy. And quite rightly. Telepathy is nonsense, we can't perceive things at a distance; we must approach them, approach the stars with number, matter with analysis, and the microscope; and when we have eliminated sensation and bodily presence we can approach anything by concentration. I admit that there

may perhaps be premonitions, dreams, apparitions, and visions; I admit that, but on principle I do not want to have anything to do with it. I decline it, and reject it. I am no visionary, I am analytic; full reality does not disclose itself to us; it must be won with arduous labour, by means of analysis and concentration. You admit that the brain is the instrument of analysis, but you guard yourself from the conception that perhaps it is a lens which brings objects nearer to us, although we do not move from the spot, or open our eyes. A strange lens the power of which changes according to our attention and will. A strange bringing near which does not take place in space, or in time, and only manifests itself through the intensity of the sensations, and the scraps of knowledge that are in you. A strange will that brings to your consciousness objects independent of your will. You conceive ideas that did not arise in you, are not yours, and on which you have no influence. Yours is only the concentration. When you look, when you listen, you perceive through your sense-organs, in your nervous centres, objects and events which are external to you. In the same way you can have thoughts and feelings which are external to you, you can have recollections which are external to you, and are not in relation to yourself. It is as natural as

seeing or hearing, but you do not possess the application and the practice."

The surgeon shifted himself uneasily, but apparently the clairvoyant took no notice; he continued his lecture with relish, he moved his nose, and hands, and croaked with a deep and satisfied conviction that he was singing. "Look out," he said, and put his finger on his nose, "I said, thoughts, recollections, images, feelings. That is a crude and inaccurate psychology, and I used these misleading ideas only because they are familiar to you. In reality, as far as I perceive in this way, I have the conception of a circle, and not of the material of which it is made; I have a sensation, I have a certain conception of a man, and not of his individual experiences, images, and memory. Understand," he said, knitting his brows with the effort to express himself clearly, "of a man contracted in time, a man in whom it exists in the present, everything that ever he was, and what he ever did, but not as a sequence of events, but like—like—" With his hands he indicated in the air something comprehensive. "It is as if you made a film of a man's life from the moment he was born until now, and then placed all the pictures on the top of each other, and projected them all at once. You say, what a medley! Yes, for the present coalesces with the past, covers everything over,

and only the form of the life remains as something indescribable, and immensely individual; something like a personal aura, in which everything is contained.” His nose was fixed and tragic. “Everything, THE FUTURE AS WELL,” he sighed. “That man won’t live.”

The surgeon snorted. He knew that, too. And for certain.

“I should like to tell it to you as objectively as I can,” essayed the clairvoyant. “Let’s suppose that a man came here highly gifted with the capacity of smell —there are such people. First he would detect a simultaneous, not very agreeable, and very complex odour; being capable of olfactory attention, he would begin to analyse it; he would recognize the smell of the hospital, of the surgery, tobacco, water, breakfast, of us three, and of our homes; perhaps he might even recognize that on this bed before me an old man died apparently after an operation on the kidneys.

The surgeon frowned. “Who told you that?”

“Nobody, but you don’t know the sensitivity of smell. With a certain amount of concentration it is possible to analyse a given simultaneous impression into an objective or a temporal sequence. If your sensation of a certain personality is acute enough and COMPLETE, you can with sufficient analytical and logical

ability unravel it into an outspread picture of his life story. Out of the condensed form of his life you can deduce its individual events. If I told you that it is about the same kind of task as if you had been given the final sum of a long row of numbers, nothing but the sum, and you had to analyse it into its individual components, you would consider it to be quite hopeless. Yes, it is difficult, but not hopeless; for you must realize that in its inner character a four that has arisen from adding up two twos is not the same as a four that has arisen from the adding up of four ones, or of three and one."

He was sitting all hunched up, the points of his vertebrae sticking out like a bristling crest. "Dreadful," he groaned, "it was dreadful, that unconsciousness, and fever. Think of it, the more I concentrated on him, the more I became faint and delirious. That is, not me, I was awake, but I felt that unconsciousness and fever—in myself. Understand I must find it in myself, otherwise—otherwise it would not be, and I could not find out—" He shuddered, and his face was haggard with suffering, it was painful to watch him. "To make your way through that frightful unconsciousness, through that confused physical delirium in which bodily pains float like broken bits of ice—and at the same time to

have always, always that supremely, definite, urgent, crushing feeling of the complete form of that life." He pressed his closed fists to his temples, his eyes were staring out, and he moaned: "Oh God, oh God, that was like going mad."

The specialist cleared his throat, and fished from his pocket a box of malted toffee. "Here you are, little man, have one," he mumbled. It was a special treat that was only given to a few, in fact, only to specially serious patients with perfect clinical symptoms.

## C H A P T E R   X I I I

THE clairvoyant brightened up, sucked the sweet, and settled down comfortably with crossed legs like a Turk, or a tailor. "I shall describe it to you in another way," he said, "but I warn you that even then it will be only a picture. When you strike a tuning-fork to give note A, the A string of a violin, or of a piano, also gives out a note, and everything begins to vibrate, even if it is inaudible to us, if it can vibrate at the A pitch. In much the same way we resound, we sing as we listen; and the musically receptive are those who know better how to listen to themselves. Think of life as of some sort of resounding, that a man resounds, that his mind, memory, and subconscious self are resounding; and his past, too, is also vibrating at this and at any other moment; it is a tremendously complex and infinitely multiple sound, in which the past is also present in an eternal progressive pianissimo, and it gives the dominant and minor notes; the whole past colours the sound of the present. Realize that also in us through transference from outside the same waves begin to vibrate, at any rate to the extent that we are in some kind of relation with the man who is transmitting into space his number

of periods—like every one of us, every one of us; this resonance is weaker or stronger depending on our tuning, our sensitiveness, and alertness, and on the intensity of the particular relation. That resonance may be so weak and indistinct that we do not perceive it; or it may be so deep and strong that we hear nothing but it, nothing but the vibration that is transmitted to us. But even if we are not conscious of the response we are conscious of its emotional echo in our sympathies and antipathies, in the vague and inexplicable reactions with which we instinctively respond to people otherwise unknown to us."

The clairvoyant felt obviously pleased, and sucked energetically at his sweet, smacking his lips and gasping like a baby at the breast. "Yes, it is like that," he added with emphasis as if for himself. "We must listen to ourselves; we must perfect our own inner being so as to discern that silent and multiple message that some other person is sending out. There is no other second sight but to watch oneself; what is called telepathy is not reception from a distance, but from close at hand, the very shortest distance, and the most difficult to attain—from one's self. Just imagine that all at the same time you brought into action all the pipes, registers, and pedals of an organ; it would make a tremendous

noise, but one in which you could recognize the breath, scope, strength, and perfection of that instrument. You would not be able by any kind of analysis to find out what had been played on that organ before, for (at least to your ears) the organ would have no memory to colour the sound. That first, that inarticulate resonance with which we respond to the life frequency of someone else, is also above all things the feeling of scope, life's space, strength, and nobility . . . a feeling of an absolutely definite and unique space formation, in which that life has evolved with its own particular atmosphere, and perspective——” The clairvoyant grew somewhat confused. “So you see what I am mixing up together: the organ and perspective, sight and hearing. It is frightfully difficult to express these things. Our words are the substitutes of sensations, they are derived from seeing, hearing, and touching; it is impossible to express with them ideas that are not accessible to these senses. Do be patient with me, gentlemen.”

“It doesn't matter,” said the specialist encouragingly. “This mixing of images, and interchange of the senses is a typical characteristic of certain mental disorders, akin to hallucinations. Go on, it gives a proper clinical picture.”

“It is characteristic,” the clairvoyant continued, “that

through analysis of this complete sensation you get a picture of life completely different from what experience gives you. Experience synthesizes life out of individual moments; minutes and hours make up a day, days a year, hours and days are the masonry of life. A man is composed of his experiences, feelings, qualities, acts, and manifestations. Everything is made for us out of small pieces, which together give us something like a whole; but if we want to imagine this whole in some way or other we can only bring into present consciousness a bigger or smaller series of these pieces, only a sequence of episodes, only a pile of details. Let us say you," he turned suddenly to the specialist, "you are a widower, aren't you? Think of your late wife, whom you loved dearly, and with whom you lived for a quarter of a century in devotion and harmony, and I will enumerate the parts of her life that float up into your mind: her death; her great struggle, over which you stuck fast, helpless, cursing your science; her habit of cutting pages of books with a needle, against which you fought in vain; the day when you first met her; a happy day when you were together somewhere picking up shells by the sea."

"That was in Rimini," said the old gentleman softly, making a motion with his hand. "She was a good wife."

"She was. But if you tried to remember for hours nothing would come in your mind but a broken series of more and more episodes, a couple of phrases, a couple of tiny pictures—That's all. That is how your imagination views the whole life of some person nearest to you."

The old specialist removed his glasses, and cleaned them carefully; the surgeon made a strenuous effort to convey some sign to the clairvoyant with his eyes. "I say, not there, not there, turn round and follow another line."

"Yes," said the clairvoyant obediently turning, and driving at full speed in another direction. "Experience cannot give us another impression; we never comprehend through our senses a whole man, or a whole life, but only those discontinuous pieces and moments, and yet, thank God, we lose most of them. Vain glory, from that you cannot create, or work out the totality of life. But turn it round, I say, turn it round. Try to begin, begin logically, at the conception of a condensed and complete life, undivided into past and present. That's grand," he began to shout, and he almost tore his hair with enthusiasm. "If you imagine a river, a complete river, not as a meandering line on the map, but concisely, and completely, with all the water which ever flowed between its banks, your image will com-

prise the flowing river and the sea, all the seas of the world, the clouds, the snow, and the water vapour, the breath of the dead, and the rainbow in the sky, all that, the whole circulation of all the water in the world will be that river. How fine it is," he sobbed in ecstasy. "What a magnitude of reality it has! How beautiful and overwhelming it is to capture the conception of life, the sensation of life, the feeling of a man in his totality, and life's greatness! No, no, no," he waved his finger held erect, "you don't break that magnitude down into days and hours, or tear it into the litter of reminiscences; but you analyse it into essentials, into periods arching like vaults, into sequences which form the order of one's life; there is no chance, everything is determined, awesome, and beautiful, all causality appears in the simultaneity of cause and effect. There are no qualities, no events; only moulding forces," he gasped, "the interplay of which, and equilibrium, have determined the space of man."

There were flecks of foam in the corners of his mouth, he was terrible to look at as he grew gaunt with excitement. "Well, well," growled the specialist, taking out his watch. "And now, my little friend, lie down for five minutes and keep your chops shut. Close your eyes and breathe deeply and slowly."

THE clairvoyant opened his eyes, and breathed deeply. "Can I say something more? It's true that these things get on one's nerves." He rubbed his face. "Well, then, with regard to that man who fell from the sky—What shall I call him?"

"We call him Case X," observed the surgeon.

The clairvoyant sat up. "Case X, yes. If you are expecting me to tell you his name, who he really is, and what place he comes from, I must tell you in advance that I don't know. These are details which do not matter very much. For most of his life he didn't stick to what from time to time was his occupation. I have a feeling of tremendous life dimensions; in that man there is much space, much sea, but he was not a traveller. Understand that the life space of a traveller is measurable; but here—an objective is lacking here; there is no fixed point from which it would be possible to fix distances and directions."

The clairvoyant halted, silent and dissatisfied. "No no, I must begin in a different way. In fact, I ought to begin with his death which is yet to be, and proceed backwards like a man spinning a rope. The life of

Caesar began when a Caesar was born, and not a baby wrinkled and crying. We ought to begin at the last breath of the man to understand what was his life form, and what meaning pertains to anything he has experienced. Only with death is the youth and birth of a man complete." He shook his head. "But I can't, can't. How wretched is our conception in time!"

"For instance," he began again after a time. "If I tell you that he did not know his mother, it sounds like the beginning of a chronicle. But for me it was not a beginning but the end of a long, strenuous line further back. He lies unconscious, and knows nothing any longer; but even under this unconsciousness, at the bottom of that darkness—deep, deep in him is solitude, and over his unconsciousness no one's shadow is falling. Where, and from what does this inner solitude continually spring? You must go back to the very beginnings of things, back through the whole of his life to the source of his loneliness. He was the only child, and he did not know his mother. There was never a hand of which he could take hold, nobody said to him: 'That's nothing, I shall kiss it, and the pain's already gone.' Strange how this was missing in his life. The voice that assured him: 'That's nothing, that will pass; don't cry, don't fret about, go on playing.

Here's my hand, hold it fast.' There never was a hand like that; and therefore never, understand, never could he clasp——" The clairvoyant made a helpless movement. "He was strong, but not patient. He had nothing to hold on to."

"Solitude," he said afterwards. "He sought out solitude so that there should not be such a discrepancy between himself and his surroundings. He tried to melt his inner destitution like a piece of ice in the immense solitude of the sea, or of foreign countries. He always had to forsake something to give an outward reason for his destination. Everywhere and always it was going on with him——" He frowned. "And where was the family? Why didn't his father make up for the mother's hand? We shall have to ask him about that. We must try to find out what was so irritable and touchy in him. He did not get on with people, and at once he sought out means of coming into conflict with them; he always had a feeling that he must defend himself, all the time he was up in arms. To turn back. To turn back to the child that had no mother, and who towards his father maintained a fierce and silent antagonism. The two could not understand each other. The widower wanted to wield the power and influence of two, he duplicated his authority, and overdid it in

a petty and touchy manner with pedantic fussiness; inevitably the child became obstinate, and opposition grew in him like a permanent moral kink. For the whole of his life he has not been able to get rid of that conflict with society, order, discipline, constraint, and such like; until the time of his death he has continued to oppose his father." The clairvoyant was fretful and talked with clenched fists as if that relentless fight were taking place inside him. "Strange how these two opposite forces—loneliness, antagonism—have contended with each other during the whole life of this man. Solitude effaced the conflict, the conflict effaced the solitude; neither one nor the other ever attained fulfilment; with all his solitude he never became a hermit, he gained no victory from all his encounters and excitements; for always the feeling of loneliness overcame him. He was melancholy and quarrelsome, violent and perplexed; you might say inconstant, but this inconstancy was an emotional balance of two forces set against each other.

Add together all that falls on the side that I have called solitude. Dreaming and desire for rest, resignation, indifference, lack of will, laziness and melancholy, aimlessness, passivity and dullness, enervation, yes. And now on the side of conflict: discontent, enterprise,

a feverish and inventive spirit, vanity, obstinacy and pig-headedness, waywardness, acerbity, and so on. When you are building up a man out of qualities, well, put these two sides together somehow! A man may be either lazy or enterprising, or perhaps partly both, alternately one and the other, isn't that so? You can never understand a man if you keep on describing his qualities. It is not the qualities, it is the forces, forces which oppose each other, upset and check; and the man himself, living only in the present, is not aware that the small action which he is performing is the resultant of forces which run like lightning through the whole of his life, amounting to the tension between birth and death.

Imagine a man who wanders from place to place, from island to island, where God allows and chance directs; he does so out of laziness, and indolence, aimlessly seeking solitude and a refuge for his hazy dreams. But he could do the same from impatience, stamping his foot like a stallion in the stall; just to be somewhere else, try something else, and again let it drop and dash along after another goal. This map and the other may coincide exactly; but they are two different worlds, two different universes; different is the world of a man who fells trees, builds huts, and founds planta-

tions from that of the loafer who gapes into the crowns of the trees, experiencing the delight and the nostalgia of his solitude. And I, who have been tracing backwards the footsteps of Case X, have found two worlds which do not resemble each other; they only come in like episodes in a dream. Through the one world, through the world in which one is busy building and getting things into shape, the face of the other gazed at me, a sad and weak face which had discovered the vanity of all things; and again through it the first face forced its way in which one shouts, hurries and builds, argues and plans, God knows why, the devil knows what, and for what purpose. That—that was not reality," sighed the clairvoyant, "that was a nightmare, that was a grin; one reality a man can experience, but two he can only dream; and he who wanders through two worlds at the same time has no foundation under his feet, and he falls through a void in which there is nothing by which to measure his fall; for the stars fall too when a man is falling. Listen," he burst out, "that man was not quite real, and he lived most of his life in a dream."

THE clairvoyant was silent, looking disconcerted and squinting at the tips of his fingers.

“Where did he live?” asked the surgeon.

“The tropics,” mumbled the clairvoyant. “Islands. A dark brown feeling, something like roast coffee, asphalt, vanilla, or negroes’ skin.”

“Where was he born?”

“Here, somewhere here,” indicated the clairvoyant indefinitely. “With us, in Europe.”

“And what was he?”

“Surveyor, no? A man who shouts at people.” He knitted his brows as if he were thinking. “But originally he was a chemist.”

“Where?”

“In a sugar factory, of course,” said the clairvoyant, as if it upset him to be asked something so obvious. “That’s in keeping, isn’t it? Those two incongruous worlds. In winter the campaign, bustle, shouting—and in summer, silence, the factory idle, and only in the laboratory a man working. Or dreaming.” With his finger he drew a hexagon in the air. “You know, of course, how formulae are written in chemistry? Like

a hexagonal figure, from the corners of which letters are sticking out. Or like lines which form a cross with branches——”

“Those are structural formulae,” explained the specialist. “It is called stereochemistry. Those diagrams you know represent the arrangement of the atoms in the molecules.”

The clairvoyant nodded with almost nothing but his nose. Yes. Imagine that those diagrams of his make a kind of network. He looks into the air to see how they combine and intercept, fit on to the next, and even intercross. He scribbles it down on paper, and breaks into a fury when anyone disturbs him. Not in winter, in winter it is activity, bustle, and impatience; but in summer—in a factory laboratory like that, with a roasting sun, and a sugary smell like candy. Here he sits with an open mouth and gapes into the void at those diagrams; they look like a honeycomb in which one diagram links up with another to make a single system. But it's not in a plane, it's in a space of three, four dimensions; all the time it eludes him when he tries to draw it on a flat piece of paper. And the heat—even the buzzing of a fly can be heard against the window-pane.

The clairvoyant blinked thoughtfully with his head

bent to one side. "That isn't just one moment, it's weeks and months—I don't know how many years. All the time he is constructing that chemical space made up of formulae, which become complete and link up with each other. They are no longer real known compounds, but possible and imaginary; non-existent and new combinations to fill up the empty gaps in chemical space; new and unknown isomers and polymers," he burst out uncertainly, "polymerization and multi-valency, which lead him on to unsuspected combinations of atoms. He dreams of those imaginary compounds and their possible properties. They are drugs, rainbow colours, unknown scents, explosives, materials with which the face of the world might be changed. He covers one note-book after the other with formulae of aromatic compounds, acids, polysaccharides, and salts, which so far do not exist, but which will take their place in that crystallized space of chemical formulae. The longer he works the more he is led to believe that it is possible to imagine and work out unknown molecules of compounds, just as Mendeléeff worked out unknown atoms of elements. At the same time he is moved with pleasure because he is discrediting and breaking down current scientific ideas—always that motive of conflict and revolt. He begins on laboratory

experiments with this or that supposed combination of matter; but the experiments are not successful, the factory laboratory is not sufficient for them. He chooses one or two formulae which seem to him quite obvious, they only need to be put into effect, and he travels in search of the international luminary of chemical science to present them to him, and to persuade that archpriest that they deserve an exhaustive experimental trial."

The clairvoyant shrugged his angular shoulders. "Of course, it was shattering. In a few words the luminary of science reduced the suppositions of the young chemist to smithereens. Nonsense, impossible. Evidently you haven't seen the work of so-and-so, read this and that. And at the end a rare benignity: Besides, you can stay with me; I'll find some sort of a job for you, perhaps trim the lamps, or watch the filters. If you are patient, and when you have learned to work scientifically . . . Only Case X was not patient, and didn't want to learn to work scientifically; he went away stammering, and fled from the ruins of his chemical space in such a panic that—that he didn't halt till on the edge of the shadows, where good-naturedly and unscientifically the broad teeth of negroes glistened at him."

The clairvoyant raised his finger. "To make it quite clear: that scientific bonze did the right and honest thing, for he defended science against an intruder. He would have been willing to accept a verified fact, but on principle he rejected a hypothesis which at the beginning would create more disorder and uncertainty than anything else. HE HAD to crush Case X; in the totality of life things, you know, don't occur accidentally and at random, but are directed by necessity."

It was clear that the surgeon was becoming afraid that the clairvoyant was turning again to abstract things, and therefore he hurriedly inquired: "Then he wasn't a chemist any longer?"

"No, he wasn't a chemist any longer. There was no voice in him to tell him: 'That's nothing, that will pass, go on playing.' Each of his shipwrecks was final and couldn't be undone. When with a few words his chemical edifice collapsed, that innate feeling of solitude and destitution welled up in him with great force—understand, almost a satisfaction that it was in such ruins, such dreadful rubble. He put away his notebooks without looking at them again, and went away even from the sugar factory to make the mess still greater; he himself was almost horrified by that feeling of vanity and nothingness, and still more because

he really felt at home in that debacle, and he took to flight."

"He was a young man," objected the surgeon.  
"Well, was there nobody——"

"There was."

"A girl, was it?"

"Yes."

"Did he like her?"

"He did."

There was silence. The clairvoyant, clasping his knees, kept his eyes down, and breathed through his teeth. "Surely I needn't tell you everything," he said in a thin voice at last. "I am no chronicle. For it's certain that in his love there was solitude, and obstinacy, and he certainly destroyed her as he destroyed everything—out of sheer obstinacy, and because he was going into solitude. What devastation! Now he can sit down and see how everything can be reduced to bits. As a child he used to crawl into the lumber-room; nobody found him there, he was alone, and his obstinacy melted in his solitude. Always the same manuscript of life." He outlined something in the air. "Obstinacy moved him and solitude released him. He would have liked to lie quiet, but revolt pricked him. Out of obstinacy he would have liked to stay

settled, but solitude asked him what was the good, what was the good. It was only left for him to wander."

The clairvoyant raised his head. "Perhaps he was a chemist full of genius. Perhaps his ideas would have upset the world. But do you imagine that a man of his upbringing had the patience step by step, experiment by experiment, at the price of lousy mistakes and failures, scientifically to ferret out and verify his system of chemical ordinates? He stood at the threshold of something big, but the scientific drudgery that would have taken him an inch further terrified him. He was to be broken. That was his inner destiny, in fact something like a flight from a task which was beyond his strength. If he had remained a chemist, he would also have only wandered from one thing to another among experiments and phantasies, without an aim, losing himself in a space too large for him. He had to wander over the seas and islands so that the deep restlessness of his spirit was represented by it. You," he said, stabbing at the specialist with his finger, "you spoke of the interchange of ideas. You must realize that there is also a transference of fate, and that sometimes external events stand for a far deeper theme that is written inside us."

## CHAPTER XVI

THE clairvoyant reached for a cigarette; the surgeon held up the burner and offered him a light. "Muchissimas gracias," mumbled the clairvoyant, bowing deeply; he didn't notice that the surgeon was watching the reaction of his pupils. "Strange," he said, sputtering away the shreds of tobacco. "Strange how his surroundings stick to a man, well, what is called the outer world. Outside surroundings relate to his inner self much more strongly than as a sum of agents which condition his actions. Rather," he said hesitatingly, "as if these surroundings were flowing out from his inner self, or were conditioned by his life; as if they were simply . . . an unwinding of the fate that is in him. Yes, right, it is like that, if we take the life of a man as a whole, and not as a series of episodes."

"Let's take . . . Case X. An impression of unusual space; in him there is much sea, and many places—understand, purely extensively and numerically, a large amount of solitude, departures, and of that restlessness which mirrors itself in flitting from place to place. A man whose soul is complex lives in a complex and strange *milieu*. That factory laboratory, scorched by

the sun, in which he wandered among his diagrams and visions, was a premonition of the scorching countries in which he was to wander, accompanied by the scent of roasted sugar. Where was he? I have a perfectly definite impression, peculiar and olfactory. Heat trembling over a brown field, a deep, eternal buzzing, cracking sound, guttural bubbling, and shrieks like laughter, and vomiting. Countries made of lethargy, and feverish excitement. And always the sea, the sea, restless and phosphorescent; ships smelling of hot wood, tar, and chocolate. Guadeloupe, Haiti, and Trinidad."

"What do you say?" burst out the surgeon.

"What?" asked the clairvoyant distractedly.

"You said Guadeloupe, Haiti, and Trinidad."

"I?" exclaimed the clairvoyant. "I hardly know, I wasn't thinking of any names," He knitted his brows. "Strange that I said that. Hasn't it ever happened to you that you have become conscious of something only by saying it? It must be like that. Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Porto Rico," he enumerated like a schoolboy. "Martinique, Barbados, the Antilles, and B-Bahama Islands," he ran on happily with relief. "God, for how many years haven't I recalled those names," he rejoiced. "I used to like so much those exotic words. Antilles, antelopes, mantillas——" Suddenly he stopped, "Mantil-

las, mantillas, wait—Spanish ladies, Cuba. He must have been some time in Cuba," he gasped. "I've a kind of . . . Spanish feeling, I don't know how to express it; it's like a romance."

"A moment ago you said *muchissimas gracias*," reminded the surgeon.

"Did I? I was hardly aware." He glanced thoughtfully sideways. "You see, that also gives space . . . such a strange spaciousness. On one side those old Spanish families, aristocracy, sir, a world to itself, tradition and respectability, mantillas and crinolines; or American naval officers—how these worlds clash. How many races and riff-raff . . . down to those negroes in the clearing who tear to pieces a live chicken with their teeth, voodoo, voodoo—the bellowing and flopping of the mating frogs; the clatter of the wooden mill crushing the sugar-cane; the shrieks and guffaws of the mulattos kicking with their legs in the clasp of lust; teeth and shiny bodies—what a heat, what a heat," he murmured, soaking with sweat so much that his limp pyjamas stuck to his back. "The drone of a moth which crackles as it flies into the fire. And overhead the Southern Cross like a chemical formula, and thousands of starry constellations which outline in the sky the formulae of unknown and strongly smelling compounds."

"And again," he waved with his erect finger, "it was beyond him, and in him at the same time: laziness and hypertrophy—a blind creative force, and that drowsy lethargy, two fevers, a fire dying and fecund. In him, in him, everything was in him. Again those frogs which mate together out of infinite boredom, a wooden mill of routine, animals roaring, bare feet flopping in the dark in search of vain and sweaty satisfaction—and terribly flaming stars, and the man in the universe pinned down to the earth like a mounted beetle; and again the ship tossing at anchor, and rocking sluggishly in the slimy water of the harbour; an impatient desire to run away from those frogs, and from that mill; the feeling that everything ought to be different, but that it is not worth while. Pieces of the world, or lumps of the soul; there's no difference. It's all the same."

"He was alcoholic, wasn't he?" asked the specialist.  
"A heavy drinker, wasn't he?"

"How do we know," said the clairvoyant vaguely, "whether a man drinks out of solitude or out of obstinacy? What is he loosening and melting in him: the ice of destitution or a little ill-tempered, jumping flame? You're right, he had gone to pieces very much; he could have been a powerful gentleman with fat lips, instead of rolling about swollen with rum, or

dried up with fever like that. Why didn't he provide himself with a ball of gold which would have tied him to one place? Property makes a man settled and cautious. He could have been rich and afraid of death."

"Nothing else?" asked the surgeon after a moment's silence.

The clairvoyant grinned. "You would like me to invent something, wouldn't you? A beautiful creole for him to fall in love with. Some erotic adventure in which his life would be at stake. Wild animals, and tornadoes. Interesting events in an active life. I'm sorry," he jeered, "but events aren't in my line; I look at life in its totality, and I can't provide you with chequered life stories." He seemed annoyed as if he had lost the thread. "I know," he mumbled, "you're interested in that scar on his leg. It was nothing, only an accident; he had no passion for hunting, and he didn't look for excitement in danger." He knitted his brows and swayed with the strain of remembering. "He fell foul of a wild beast that others were hunting," he burst out at last, glad that it was over. "It's true, he went through a lot; but that was because at first he was impatient and irritable; that is, he was prone to encounter situations that don't occur to people of a quiet disposition. Later on he became lazy, and dull,

and without caring for it, wealth began to cling to him, his outward restlessness was succeeded by a drowsy and misguided kink in his mind. Most of the time he lay in his room, his mouth half open with the heat, listening to the buzzing of the flies against the mosquito netting; for hours at a time, for whole days he gaped at the ceiling, and at the wall stuck over with patterned wallpaper It was covered with hexagonal pictures, like a honeycomb, and he put up with them without thought and without motion."

## C H A P T E R   X V I I

“STRANGE,” exclaimed the clairvoyant, “how his life was closing in and becoming almost reconciled in that feeling of solitude. Apparently in his childhood he had been surrounded by walls covered with the same or a similar kind of design, and even then there was a feeling of solitude in him. If he had cried openly the nurse would have gone to ask what was the matter with him; but now it was an old negress with long breasts flapping like shiny plaice.

All his life might be only a dream amidst those regular diagrams; who knows how long a dream lasts, perhaps a second, perhaps an hour. All other things, in fact, only came to disturb that ingrained solitude of a lonely child: his father’s reprimands, school, youth, the sugar factory, and his wanderings, Lord, that futile wandering! Some huge bug with orange and green dots running over the patterned wallpaper, not in a straight line as if it wished to get anywhere, but here there, here there, always stopping for a moment, and then off again somewhere else; he gazed at it for hours, too lazy to get up and throw it out. And then, yes, still that irritated buzzing of the fly hitting its head

against the mosquito netting. That was everything; but what came from outside, the gabble of the negroes, the clacking of the mill, the dry rustling of the palm-trees, the rustle of the sheaves of sugar-cane, cracking in the heat of the sun, a thousand voices and murmurs, all that was nothing, only so much phantasy; he could half-close his eyes and listen to it flowing away into nothingness.

In that lethargy a scrap of a paper or a copy of a journal fell into his hands, the journal of some professional publication, or something like that; he turned over the pages without interest, and halted at a hexagonal diagram from the corners of which rays ran out with symbols of atoms. How about it, how about it, it was a very long time since such-like things had interested him. But the pictures on the wall changed into chemical formulae, they seemed to grin at him, again he took the bit of paper in his hand, and studied that diagram with contracted eyebrows, spelled out the letters, and struggled through the erudite text. Suddenly he sat up, sprang up, ran about in the room, and beat his head. Yes, yes, surely it was that very diagram, that damned chemical formula, with which more than twenty years ago, yes, Christ, what a long time, what a long time! with which he had gone to the archpriest

of chemistry, and, sir, if you gave permission for work in your laboratory—on a bigger scale—with this supposed compound. He raised his bristly eyebrows —what long hair; nonsense, impossible. Apparently you haven't heard of this and that authority, you haven't read this and that work: ages ago I showed scientifically that the benzole group, and so on. Case X ran round the room, and snorted excitedly. And here it's in black and white, signed by some American, of course; and unsuspected industrial possibilities, he says—Case X halted as if rooted to the ground. And that was only one link of a chain of possibilities, one stone in the vault; that formula would link up with another like the cells of a honeycomb in accordance with geometrical laws. And they don't know that, Case X sniggered, they haven't got to that; but it's written down, everything set out, and written down in those notebooks, put away in a box, in a lumber-room. With them are broken toys, and clothes from mother. Perhaps termites have already destroyed everything. No, there are no white ants there; everything is just as it was . . . ”

The clairvoyant, sitting on the bed, began to sway with his body. “He sat on the bed, swaying to and fro, strenuously recalling what those formulae were like,

and how they fitted together. But his mind was unbalanced through heavy drinking and indolence, flight and solitude; he beat at that learned paper with his fist as if he wanted to force it into compliance, but what could he do, what could he do with that dull and thick head. Instead of chemical formulae, the Southern Cross, Eridanus, Centaur, and Hydra stole into his mind. He still tried to brush it all away, but it weighed on him like a numb and dreadful strain; and suddenly it came—like a flash; I will go home and find those notebooks. It was as if everything fell away from him, such a peculiar and immense relaxation. Then he got up, opened the window for a fly which was buzzing madly and in desperation against the net, he also set free the bug helplessly wandering over the wall.”

The clairvoyant with his head to one side seemed to enjoy the taste of this picture. “It’s strange,” he observed, “that it’s possible to explain the same event in two entirely different and at the same time correct ways. If Case X decided so precipitously to return, you would say, and so would he: it was so, that they would not steal his spiritual property. He began to be terribly anxious about his notebooks when he realized that they might be of some value. Certainly it would

be possible to draw from it a considerable sum of money—even that side of the business was of some interest to Case X, who was no longer a young fellow. But chiefly there was the motive that it was HIS business, that strong accent on the *I* which none of us men escapes. We defend OUR possessions, OUR rights, OUR work so instinctively and ferociously as if we were defending our own life.

But on the other side,” said the clairvoyant, bending his head over the other shoulder as if to gain a favourable point of view, “these are immediate or actual motives, I should say, mere pretexts on which an act or a decision could be arrived at. If we view Case X in the light of the totality of his life, the matter is different. Not only was the matter of his spiritual property at stake, but something bigger and more difficult; duty, which he ran away from once by letting himself be defeated. He violated the task he wasn’t equal to, and he let it slip out of his hand; from that time on he lived an odd, stray life that was not his own; one might say that he ran off his proper track. Yes, one may call it his tragic error, and it really was an error, even although he could not have acted differently. And then he returned—or was by his inner guidance turned back to the way which he had lost because he had not the

patience and consistency to go on with it. He was returning, a man physically ruined, infected with the canker of lassitude, but mature. Then at last he realized the dreadful and inexorable constraint of life, for he felt it his duty to die. The circle was closing in, and necessity was being fulfilled."

"So he did want to come back?" reminded the surgeon after a while.

"Yes, but first he had to do this and that: to sell the property and suchlike things. The more those outside obstacles became involved the more violently his impatience accumulated; through the days of delay his haste almost became an affliction; he was beyond himself with the fury of return, every minute was for him a nagging torment; at last he disentangled and tore away everything, and back he dashed to where he had come from."

"By boat?" asked the surgeon.

". . . I don't know. But if he had been borne by a ray of light, even that would have been intolerably slow for him, and he would have pressed his nails into his palms with insane impatience. Certainly his return was violent and infinite like a headlong fall."

"I looked at the map," observed the surgeon. "He might have come via Florida, Europe, or via Natal,

Dakar, Europe. But wasn't it chance that he should have found an aeroplane ready!"

"Chance," mumbled the clairvoyant. "There is no such thing as chance. It was predestined that he should travel with such fury. He left behind a fiery trail like a meteor."

"And . . . why did he crash?"

"He was at home then." The clairvoyant raised his eyes. "Understand, he had to crash. He could not do anything more. It was enough that he had come back."

## CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT could be done, what could be done when his heart weakened; it beat quicker, always quicker, but his blood-pressure fell; how soon would that tattered heart stop with a faint hiccup? The end of Case X. Who put that nosegay by his bed?

“There’s a new kind of serum for yellow fever, they say,” the famous specialist was heard to say. “But where could we get it here, eh? Besides, he’ll die of heart-failure, even God can’t help him with that.”

The nurse crossed herself.

“That clairvoyant of yours,” went on the old coryphe, sitting on the edge of the bed, “that’s a nice neurotic. But how he described the interconnection of those solitary and excited periods was quite interesting. It would correspond to the periodic succession of depression and excitation in a badly balanced man. That explains sufficiently well the story of Case X.”

“As much as we know,” said the surgeon, shrugging his shoulders.

“Something surely, my friend,” said the specialist. “That body says a lot. For instance, that he was down there a long time, but that he was not born there; he

caught any tropical disease that was going, *ergo* he was not acclimatized. I ask you, why did he run away to such lost places?"

"I don't know," muttered the surgeon. "I'm not a clairvoyant."

"Nor am I, but I'm a doctor," said the old gentleman with meaning.

"Look here, he was periodically neurotic, a dual personality, easily succumbing to fits of depression."

"That's what that clairvoyant explained to you," grinned the surgeon.

"Of course, but patellar reflexes also say something. Hum, what did I want to say?—Yes, a cyclothymic like that easily gets into conflict with his surroundings, or his employment; weariness comes over him, he lets everything go, and runs away. If he were physically weaker he might submit passively; but that chap was so physically developed—you've noticed that, haven't you?"

"Of course."

"His reactions must have been abnormally violent, almost throwing him off his line. As a doctor I ought not to say so, but physical weakness with many people is something like wise and gentle fetters; instinctively they put a brake on their reactions because they are

afraid not to crack up. This one had no need to be careful with himself; and so he was not afraid of such a jump. As far as West Indies, what?"

"Via service in the navy," reminded the surgeon.

"That also shows a roving disposition, doesn't it? As you were good enough to remark, it is a body of an educated man; that Case X was not born a tramp, and if he became a sailor or an adventurer, it reveals the damnable cleavage in his life. What sort of a conflict was it? It's all the same; whether it was of one kind or another, it was conditioned simply by his constitution."

The specialist leaned over the sphygmometer fastened to the arm of the unconscious man. "It's bad," he sighed, "he's sinking; he won't last much longer." He rubbed his nose, and watched with regret the faint and irregular breathing of that immovable body. "Down there," he said, "I should think that there are quite good doctors, those in colonial service; I wonder why they let him be gnawed through with framboesia. He must have lived in some place where doctors were too far away; perhaps some negro magician on Haiti, or somewhere, rubbed some stuff on it for him. That was no civilized life. Oh dear." He blew into his handkerchief, and carefully rubbed it. "A life story. You can

read many queer things." The old gentleman nodded his head thoughtfully. "And he drank, he must have drowned his wits in drink. Think of it in that climate, in that feverish and stewy heat—that was not even being alive, it was half-unconsciousness, deception, wandering away from reality——"

"What interests me most," said the surgeon suddenly becoming unusually communicative, "is why he was coming back—why he was coming back in such a dreadful hurry. First, that—that he flew in such a storm as if he couldn't wait. And then that he came back with yellow fever. Four or five days before the crash he must have been somewhere in the tropics, isn't that so? That means that he had . . . I don't know; apparently from one aeroplane to another—it's queer. I'm always wondering what a tremendously strong motive he must have had to come back with such a rush. And bang, in that flight he got killed."

The specialist raised his head. "Listen . . . he'd got to die all the same. Even if he hadn't crashed. . . . It was very nearly the end with him already."

"Why?"

"Sugar, liver—and especially the heart. There was nothing to be done. Eh, my friend, it wasn't so easy to come back. Too long a journey." The old gentleman

raised himself. "Take that sphygmometer off him, sister. Well, he came back, and now he's nearly at home. He's not wandering any further, he knows the way—isn't it true, my lad?"

"DEAR DOCTOR,

When you have a free moment, read these few pages that I enclose. I want to explain that they are about the man who fell from the sky, and whom you in the hospital called Case X. You advised me not to think of him any more; I didn't obey, and the result is these pages. If he'd had his name on the report sheet over his head, or if anyone had known the slightest bit about him, it would probably not have occurred to me to think about him; but his fatal incognito would not let me rest. This shows you how accidental and casual are the causes which excite our minds.

From that moment I have been thinking of him, this in literary language means that I have been inventing a story about him, one of the thousand stories that I haven't written and shall not write. It is a bad habit to look at people and at things for possible stories. As soon as you open your mind to possibility, you are lost; you open, as they say, the door of your phantasy; nothing prevents you from inventing anything, for the

sphere of possibility is inexhaustible, running from every face and event into infinity, with an agreeable and disturbing freedom. But look out, stop! As soon as you start on that line you discover that even by way of fiction you must travel with decision, examining the fitness of every step. Here we've got it! Now we have to split our heads deciding which possibility is possible and probable; we have to support it with our knowledge of facts and with reasons, we have to struggle with our own phantasy, nursing it so that it does not forsake that mysterious and proper path that is called truth. What folly to suck truth out of one's finger! what nonsense to invent people and stories, and then deal with them as if they were real! I will give you an axiom of metaphysical madness: that possibility which among all possibilities is the only one possible WOULD BE REALITY. See the fixed idea of men of fancy: to chase reality through the roundabout of phantoms. If you think that all we have to do is to manufacture illusions, you are mistaken; our mania is more monstrous: we attempt to achieve reality itself.

In short, for three whole days (also counting my sleep and dreams) I tried to create the reality of a life that I shamelessly invented from A to Z. I shall not write that story just as I have not written most of the

others; but to get rid of it. Besides you more or less manufactured my hero out of calico and cotton-wool, and therefore I am returning him to you, not taking into account that you advised me to blow rainbow bubbles. This might have been very rainbowy; but they say that life is too serious for us to look at its flaming and changeable colours."

The surgeon was distrustfully counting the pages of the poet's manuscript when the door opened slightly; the sister of mercy appeared and made a silent motion with her head in the direction apparently of number six. The surgeon dropped the manuscript and ran. So it had come. He frowned a little, when he discovered the young, hairy assistant sitting on the side of Case X's bed (those people from the medical block are spreading themselves too much here), and holding in his fingers the wrist of the unconscious man. A very young, nice nurse (who also didn't belong to that department)—a novice very likely; she had eyes only for that hairy assistant's mane.

The surgeon wanted to say something not very pleasant, but the assistant, who hadn't noticed him, raised his head. "I can't feel his pulse. Bring the screen sister."

## THE POET'S STORY

"LET us first recall the event that gave the impulse from which that further series of events was being developed; whether you like it or not, we must begin at this point if we are to construct our story.

On a hot, stormy day an aeroplane crashed; the pilot was burned to death, the passenger was gravely injured, and unconscious. You can't get away from the picture of the people who run together to that heap of ruins; they are excited because they are witnesses of a catastrophe, they ache with horror, giving advice one over the other as to what ought to be done; but bound with fear and squeamishness no one makes any effort to help the unconscious man. It is only when the police arrive that the heap of chaos begins to get straightened out; the police bark at the people, and send this one there, that one somewhere else; it's strange how, as a matter of course, unwillingly, but secretly glad, people obey orders with a sense of importance and relief. They run for firemen, for the doctor, to telephone for the ambulance, while the police write

down the names of witnesses, and the crowd fidgets from one foot to the other in respectful silence, for it is present at an official act. I have never witnessed such a misfortune, but I am full of it, I am one of the onlookers myself, in heated agitation I run along the hedge, to be there as well, carefully avoiding some fields (for I am a country man), I am upset, I make suggestions, express my opinion that most probably the pilot hadn't switched off the engine, and that the fire ought to have been put out with sand; all these details I invent with an unsparing hand, in a disinterested manner, for they do not fit into this or any other story; I cannot even boast to my acquaintances that I saw a great accident. You haven't the slightest bit of phantasy; and so you said 'Poor fellow,' and in saying that the affair was settled for you (not taking into account what you did as a surgeon). What a proper and simple reaction, while I toss about with cruel and painful details which I imagine for myself. I often feel ashamed when I see you others react so simply and humanly to various incidents of life which for me are only themes round which to spin with my mulish cleverness. I don't know exactly whether in it there is an unruly playfulness, or, on the contrary, a strange and relentless thoroughness; (but to return to our case) I invested that man's

fatal fall with so many pictures, horrible and grotesque, that out of shame and penitence, withdrawing contritely the gimcrack of all outside circumstance, in my story I should like to try to describe it as the fall of an archangel with broken wings. It's simpler with you; you say 'Poor fellow' as if making a holy mark on the scene of the disaster.

Perhaps this explanation strikes you as rather muddled. Phantasy for its own sake seems immoral and cruel, like a child; it indulges in horror and ridicule. How often have I led my fictitious beings along the paths of sorrow and humiliation so that I could pity them the more! Such are we, we creators of phantasy; to add glory or value to a man's life we interfere and bring in a portentous destiny, and we overburden him with trouble and adversity. But after all, doesn't it bring with it a special glory of its own? To show that he hasn't led a barren and empty life, a man nods his head and says: 'I've lived through a lot.' I say, doctor, let's share our tasks: you as becomes your profession, and out of love for the man, take away his pain, and heal his weaknesses; while I out of love for him, and as becomes my profession, will hedge him round with conflict and mortification, and poke about in his wounds without so much as a touch of Peru balsam. You stroke

the scar which has beautifully and clearly healed, while I with amazement will probe the wound. In the end it may perhaps emerge that I also relieve suffering by explaining how it hurts.

I try to excuse literature for its pleasure in jeering and in dealing with tragedy. For both of these are detours that phantasy discovered by means of which, and along their unsubstantial paths, it created the illusion of reality. Reality in itself is neither tragic nor ridiculous; it is too serious and infinite for either the one or the other. Compassion and laughter are only shocks with which we accompany and comment upon the events around us. Evoke these actions by any sort of means, and you evoke the impression that beyond you something real had taken place, the more real it is the stronger is the emotional effect. My God, what tricks and dodges we invent, we professionals in phantasy, to agitate properly and mercilessly the encrusted soul of the reader! Dear doctor, in your honest and conscientious life there isn't much room for compassion and laughter. You don't wallow excitedly in the frightfulness of a man soaked in blood, but you wipe away the blood and do what is necessary. You take no pleasure in laughing at a man with soup on his clothes, but you advise him to get himself clean, at which the

boisterous laughter of mankind is suppressed, and the event undone that gave rise to it. Well, we invent stories which you can't undo, against which you can do nothing; they are as irreparable and unchangeable as history. Throw away that book, or allow yourself to fall to the shocks that are set like snares for you, and look beyond them for the reality to which they correspond.

Here are some technical conclusions which can be drawn from the above explanation: If I proceed by way of phantasy I shall choose some striking and unusual event; like a butcher appraising a beast, I shall see if, as a sensation, it is duly plump and substantial. See, here we've got a crash, a dreadful headlong turmoil, at the sight of which you can't help but stop. Almighty God, what a hopeless heap of chaos it is! What can we make of these broken wings, and struts, how can we put it together so that it flies again, at least as a paper kite whose string I can hold in my hand? At this one can only look, dithering with fright, or like a decent man say seriously and respectfully, 'Poor fellow.'"

"ONE says of phantasy that it chops and changes; perhaps it does in some cases (which, however, aren't found in good prose), but far more frequently it runs smartly and attentively, like a dog with its nose on a fresh scent; she just gasps with eagerness, she tears along the line, and drags us here and there. You are a hunter, and you know that a setter on her zig-zag course doesn't run here and there, but on the contrary she sticks to the scent with sustained and passionate interest. I must tell you that well-developed phantasy is no uncertain dreaming, but an activity unusually relentless, and passionately determined; it is true that it halts and doubles, but only to make certain that that is not its prey. Where are you going you eager bitch; what are you after, what's the line of your aim? Aim, what an aim; I'm after something alive, and I don't know yet where I'm going to come across it.

Believe me, writing novels is more like hunting than, say, building a cathedral according to plans already drawn up. Until the very last moment we are continually surprised at what we come across; we get into unsuspected situations, but only because we are foolishly

and persistently following that trail of ours of something alive. We are after a white stag, and while doing so, almost by accident, we discover new places in the world. To write is an adventure, and I shall say no more in praise of that occupation. We can't go astray so long as we are faithful to our trail; even if our pilgrimage leads to the Crystal Mountains, along the fiery track of a falling star, our direction is good, thank God, and we haven't lost the right way. (I'm not speaking here of our anxiety when we do lose the right scent; of our miserable and helpless attempts to get further; of our inglorious homecomings with that tired and ashamed cur crawling behind us, instead of running on ahead.)

By which in so many words is said: to the devil with phantasy; it's of no use to us, and it won't lead us even to the tips of our noses if her muscles are not quivering with the fever of interest. I say, let her lie down if she hasn't before her already marked out an invisible trail, and if her tongue isn't hanging out with impatience to follow it to the end. What is called talent, is far the greater part interest or obsession, interest to follow something alive, the deer lost in the expanse of the world. Dear man, the world is wide, wider than our experience; it is made out of a handful of facts, and a

whole universe of possibilities. Anything that we do not know of is a kind of possibility here, and every fact is a bead in the rosary of past and future eventualities. It's no use, if we follow a man we must enter that world of guess-work, we must scent out his possible steps, past and future; we must pursue him with our phantasy if he is to appear to us in his invisible aliveness. It is absolutely immaterial to us whether he has been completely invented, or is completely real; an Ariel or a hawker selling tape; both are spun out of the pure and infinite material of possibility, which is the depository of everything, even of what actually was. What is called a real story, or a real person, is for us no more than one possibility among a thousand, and perhaps not even the most consistent and important one. All reality is merely a casually opened page, or a word read at random in the sibylline books; and we desire to know more.

I am attempting to show you that if we are led by phantasy we cross a threshold into some sort of infinity; the threshold of a world not bounded by our experience, wider than our scraps of knowledge, and containing infinitely more than is known to us. I tell you that we should not dare to step into those limitless regions, if we did not blunder there blind and headlong in search

of something that is eluding us. If the spirit of the tempter whispered to us: Now invent something, anything you like—we should feel embarrassed, and probably we should shrink back in terror at the vanity and senselessness of the task; we should be afraid to embark without aim and direction on that *Mare tenebrarum*. Let me put a question: What right has a man who does not want to be taken for a fool or an impostor to invent something that is non-existent? There is only one answer, luckily definite and certain: Let him, he must; he isn't doing so out of waywardness, he is being dragged into it, he dashes off after something, and his meandering course is the path of necessity. Ask not him, but God, what is necessity.

I am wondering why that man who fell from the sky got into my head; why not Ariel, or Hecuba? What is Hecuba to me! but it may happen to me that for a time she would be all for me that matters. I should fight with her until she would bless me like the angel blessed Jacob; and I might be given grace to find in myself the life and pain of an old despondent hag. God be with Hecuba; it is frivolous of me not to pay her more attention, but as I said I have on my mind a man who did not complete his flight. I think that you are to

blame for that, for you said with that well-known cool manner of yours: Why the devil did he fly in such a wind? Yes, why the devil; why all the devils; why all the accursed did he fly in such a storm? What an overwhelming and undeniable motive he must have had to undertake such a senseless flight! Isn't that something for meditation and wonder? Yes, it's a mere accident if a man gets killed; but it's not a mere accident if he flies in spite of everything. It's obvious that he HAD to fly; and then over the ruins that looked nothing more than a broken toy, the huge edifice of an event arose made up of a mere accident and necessity. Necessity and mere accident, two legs of a tripod on which Pythia sits; the third is mystery.

You let me see him, the man without a face or a name, the man without consciousness; this is the last passport of life, and anyone who cannot prove his identity with it is Unknown in the severe and forbidding sense of the word. Hadn't you a tormenting feeling that we owe him his identity? I saw it in your eyes: to know who he was, and where he wanted to go in such a hurry; perhaps we might testify that he got as far as here, and so fulfil this human duty. I am not as human as you are; I did not think of his affairs of this world, I became obsessed with the passion of investi-

gation. And now no one and nothing will detain me; fare you well, I must be after him. Since he is so unknown, I shall invent him, I shall search for him amongst his possibilities. You ask what business it is of mine? If only I knew! I only know that I became obsessed with it."

## CHAPTER XXI

"I USED the phrase 'The passion of investigation,' and I feel that it is right; but that passion arose purely by accident, and through a circumstance so petty that I ought to feel ashamed of it. When they brought you that injured man you said that apparently his papers had been burnt, and that in his pockets there was nothing but a handful of small change, some French, English, and American money, and a Dutch dubbeltje. That collection of change surprised me; you may imagine that that man really had something to do in those different countries, and what was left in his pockets was the small change that he could not spend; but whenever I have travelled I have always tried in some way or other to get rid of all the small coins of the country which I was leaving, in the first place because I should no longer be able to change them, and secondly so that they wouldn't be in the way. It has occurred to me that that man was familiar with those currencies, and that he had lived in those regions where they are in circulation. And at the same time I said to myself: Antilles, Porto Rico, Martinique, Barbados, and Curaçao —American, British, Dutch, and French colonies with the currencies of their home lands.

If I try to explain psychologically that mental jump from the handful of money to the West Indies, I find in my memory the following:

1. A strong wind blew which reminded me of Orcan. Association with the Leeward Islands, and the famous Caribbean region of cyclones.
2. I was put out, discontented, furious with myself, and with my work. Wandering images arose in my mind, and a desire for escape. Nostalgia for far-off and exotic countries; with me usually for Cuba, the island of my nostalgia.
3. An overwhelming and rather envious notion, that that man had flown from somewhere a long way off; an automatic connection of the present event with the previous disposition.
4. At last that event itself, that flying accident, an exciting and almost agreeable sensation, and at the same time the tendency to adorn it with romantic conjectures. It is a typical example, showing how strongly human catastrophies direct the course of our phantasy.

By means of all that the conjecture (as I realize now very superficial), arose in me that that handful of money pointed to the West Indies; just then I was almost enthusiastic about my perspicacity, and I felt that it was as clear as daylight that that man was coming straight

from the Antilles; it satisfied and excited me greatly. When you took me to the bed of Case X, I went feeling certain that I was going to have a look at a man who had come from my emotional Antilles. I did not tell you of my discoveries because I was afraid that you might snort contemptuously, as is your disagreeable habit; I did not want you to doubt a notion with which I was just falling in love. That man was ghastly in his unconsciousness; he was inhuman and deeply mysterious in those bandages which lay on his face the mask of silence and the unknown; but chiefly for me he was a man from the Antilles, the man WHO HAD BEEN THERE. That was decisive. From that moment he was MY Case X, which I had to solve; I set out in pursuit of him, and it was, my friend, a long and devious trail.

Yes, now I am through with it. Now it is clear to me that what I felt to be a brilliant, and likely interpretation was, strictly speaking, a mere whim of mine that gave me pleasure; and therefore I cannot write any more of my story. It might be shown, if it has not already been done, that that man was a commercial traveller from Halle-an-der-Saale, or an ordinary American trying to make himself believe that an enterprising man of business like himself has not time to wait twenty-four hours for better weather. How

deplorable! I can invent anything I like, but only on condition that I believe in it myself. As soon as my confidence that it really might have been like that is shaken, my phantasy appears to me as puerile and deplorable bungling. Well, and now you are called off, you silly and eager bitch; in vain you have romped along over the fallen leaves with your nose to the ground, pretending that you have a trail that doesn't exist, or which you lost long ago at the crossroads of possibility. You still pretend that you are on the scent, for dogs make a point of prestige; you still sniff at every mousehole, and you try to make me believe that our prey is still on the move. Well, leave it, it isn't here; you look up at me with your canine eyes as if to say: 'Is it my fault? you are the master, tell me where I am to go, show what you want!' And now I must look for the trail, look for the REASONS why he set out in this direction and not in that. Good Lord, reasons! motives! verisimilitudes! what a mess! even that dog no longer has any faith in me or in herself, and cannot understand what I want from her; this? here? or something else? Empty-handed master and dog return. Strange what a feeling of SOLITUDE there is in failure.

I will tell you this: a story has to fall to pieces if

you are to know of what it is composed. While it is whole and living you might be intoxicated with the work and swear: All this is pure nature and no deceit, sir. I am writing it out of mere instinct, I myself don't know why; it is all imagination and intuition. Not until it has fallen to pieces will you discover how you aided her, how cunningly and secretly you pushed on your phantasy. God, what a conglomeration! but truly in every direction intellectual motives and intentional constructions stick out of it; what a little engine it is! Everything, almost everything, in some way is planned and surveyed, nothing but calculation and erection. I imagined that it all came of itself to me as if in a living dream, and, instead, it is a product of relentless engineering thought that tests and rejects, binds and predicts. When it is dead, and taken to pieces, all those wires, all that ingenuity, routine, and precision of intellectual work becomes visible. And I tell you that a broken machine is equally terrifying; it is the same chasm of emptiness like life in decomposition.

But even regret for fruitless work is not equal to the sadness of a story in ruins. Don't you know that a human life is buried in those ruins? Why make a fuss, you will say, for that life was only a fiction; a tale invented to pass the time. Ah, it is strange; it is not quite certain

that that life was merely invented; and when I look at it I should say that it was MY OWN life. It is me. I am the sea and that man, that kiss blown from the dark shadow of the mouth belongs to me; that man sat by the lighthouse on the Hoe, because I sat under the lighthouse on the Hoe; and if he lived in Barbados, or Barbuda, so thank God, praise be to God, at last I have been there. All that was me; I don't invent anything, I only express what I am, and what is in me. And if I wrote of Hecuba, or of the Babylonian harlot, it would be myself; I should be the old woman who moans, and harrows her sagging and wrinkled breasts; I should be the woman crushed by lust in the hairy hands of the Assyrian, of a man with a greasy beard. Yes, man, woman, and child, to make it clear, it is me; I am the man who has not finished his flight."

## CHAPTER XXII

"So enough for the introduction, and now we can roam along the paths by which our story began to take shape. We know that the DATA was only a man who had not finished his flight, and his fall, as was explained, was a pathetic event arising from mere accident and necessity. The accident and necessity were data; since our knowledge does not reach further, let us make of them the start, or trail, along which we are going to set out; we shall attempt to construct that definite life out of two fundamental elements, out of mere accident and necessity, so that the final crash will emerge from them logically and lawfully.

Admit that the beginning holds out no little promise. Mere accident, which means freedom and adventure; a playful and unaccountable caprice, a germ of possibility and a magic carpet: what iridescent and ethereal material it is without weight or repetition, extensible, and gathered into mysterious folds, a material with which one can do anything; wings which will carry us anywhere; what is more poetical than chance? And its opposite is necessity, a shady park, a permanent force, and unchangeable necessity, which is order

and system, as fine as a colonnade, and as certain as a law.

And now it's like this; yes, this is what I want, and for which I am longing. For a chance that would bear me somewhere, the hesitating stay-at-home anchored by his seat to the table; for a chance, adventurous and rash, for a panting daredevil that would make me dance. We are growing old, my friend, and we accept life like a boring habit. Yes, but what about the other, the unconditioned and the certain? Would that my life had a meshwork of necessity, would that for once I could feel with certainty and without uneasiness that in everything I do an order is being fulfilled; praise be to God, I have not been doing anything but my task. Now see here, that man directed by necessity and chance will be myself; I shall be the one who will wander along the devious and inevitable road, and I shall pay for it with all the hardships that I can invent; for such a devious journey is no pleasure trip.

Well, then, in the name of God, let's begin; and when we do not know what is coming next let necessity or chance be our aid. How are we to begin? What shall we write as the first word of the story of a man from the Antilles? We will begin at the beginning: There was a boy who had no mother.

Bad, and you can't get any further that way. Case X, don't you know, has no face, and no name, has no identity, he is *Unknown*. If we give him a home we shall know him, so to speak, from his childhood up; he will cease to be unknown, and will lose what is now his strongest and most peculiar characteristic. If he is to stay as himself, he will have to keep his incognito; let him be a man without an origin, and without any papers. Let us stick to facts, proceed from what is given; he fell from the sky, and that is surely very characteristic of him. In our story also he ought somehow to fall from the sky, so that he emerges all of a sudden from the devil knows where, created by accident, completely finished, and perfectly unknown.

We have, then, a person and his arrival, the place where he emerges is decided for us beforehand; it is Cuba. It might be from any other of the Antilles, in fact it might be from any place in the world if only it were sufficiently remote. Distance is given us in that he flew, and that we do not know from what place; it is a far-away spot, and more or less exotic just because it is unknown to us. The money that you found in his pockets points to the Antilles; it is true that there is still another region where American, British, French, and Dutch colonies are all near together; that is along

the sea-coast bounded by the Philippines, Annam, Singapore, and Sumatra, and I have found nothing that would exclude that possibility. I had to choose, and I decided on the Antilles from motives which are apparently purely personal; I told you that they have for me a particular charm. Briefly there somewhere is the goal of my *ESCAPE*; I may never get there, but it is the spot which exists for me more strongly than the countries in which I have been.

These, then, are roughly the beginnings of our story, and it is left to us to determine the terminus *ad quem*. This, of course, is the crash of the man who had not ended his flight; but here an important point arises: Was he flying somewhere on a new project, or was he coming home? I know only that he was in a tremendous hurry, for he was flying in a heavy storm. Generally we can expect that a man who is embarking upon something new, and in pursuit of things that are not familiar to him, would show a certain hesitation, an apprehension that would check his progress, while on the contrary, a man who is returning would be rather impatient; anticipating his goal he would undervalue the means that would bear him to it. I should say that that man was in such haste because he was coming back, and I accept it as the most probable reality. Regardless of

the fact that a man who flies is free to set off to any point of the compass, for infinite is the number of conceivable possibilities and objectives from which to choose, while, on the contrary, a man who is returning can only fly to one place, the only conceivable one of them all, in pursuit of an objective laid down from the beginning, determined and unchangeable. The way back is something exactly mapped out. By this alone the end of our story is fixed, and we can begin at the beginning.

The beginning is as confused and vague as chance. It was somewhere in Cuba, amidst the hedges of Bougainvillea; someone was being pursued, revolvers barked, and on a path that resembled the milky way an unknown man was left lying with a bleeding neck. The wound was inflicted with a knife with a broad blade that is used for cutting sugar-cane."

When the surgeon had read as far as this he snorted with disapproval, and threw the manuscript on the table. Nonsense. There's no scar on the neck; there's one just above the right breast, it couldn't have been inflicted by a broad knife, but by a sharp-pointed instrument. A shallow wound that only went as far as the rib.

## CHAPTER XXIII

"SOMEWHERE in Cuba amidst the hedges of Bougainvillea someone was being pursued, revolvers barked, and on a path that resembled the milky way an unknown man was left lying with a bleeding neck. The wound was inflicted with a knife with a broad blade that is used for cutting sugar-cane. About ten yards further on someone else was lying, with arms and legs splayed out; this one was dead.

Cursing silently, three fellows bent over the one that had been stabbed; but he already began to raise himself and murmured: 'What—what do you want after all? Don't push me, Cavalier!' He felt the back of his neck, screwed up his mouth, and looked in amazement at his hand covered with blood, and at the three men. Mother of God, he was drunk!

'What business had that mule to get mixed up in this,' burst out one of the three in an angry mood, scratching his head. 'Que mierda! Take him to the house, chaps!'

They snatched him up by his arms and legs, and shuffled along; they didn't mind in the least that his backside was dragging along the road, leaving a trail

in the dust like a sack of maize. They gasped and dragged that vagabond along the milky way. Let him bump his rump, the beast!

They put him down behind a door, an old hag flashed a light on his face, and cried to all the saints, and the master of the house, something of a bigwig if we are to go by his fierce blue mug, and evil eyebrows, bent down above it all and inquired why they had taken such a brute there.

The one who scratched his head blinked with all his might at the gentleman with knitted brows. ‘So that he won’t run away, your Grace. When that cavalier went away from here, we heard shooting outside; we ran to look and found this dago lying with this revolver in his hand. A few yards further on lies that unfortunate gentleman. He is dead, may God have mercy on him!’

The other two listened with open mouths as if they wanted to raise some objection; and the gentleman regarded them with inquiring eyes. ‘Do you know for certain that he’s dead?’

The tall peon crossed himself. ‘Like a calf, your Grace. He must have got at least three bullets in the back of his head. He had a knife in his hand . . . Most likely he tried to defend himself with the knife when this bandit came across him. This cut-throat here

wanted to run away, but we put a stop to that. You agree with me, don't you, boys? Well, then, moo you oxes!'

Only now did the other two grasp his meaning, and they began to grin broadly. 'As God is above us, your Grace, that's how it was, just like that, holy truth; he tried to do a bunk after he had shot that cavalier. And he had a pistol in his hand.'

'We ought to ask the police to take care of him,' observed the tall one, looking round for corroboration.

The gentleman stroked his blue chin, and frowned darkly as he meditated. 'No, Pedro (or Salvador—names hadn't been decided on), not that. If the police were after him——' he shrugged his shoulders. 'But I shall not do it without due reason. That wouldn't be fair. Lock him up somewhere in a room and give him a drink.'

The lanky one raised his hands. 'Your Grace, he's not in a state to worry about himself.'

'Give him a drink,' repeated the gentleman impatiently. 'And while you're about it, don't cackle about him any more than you need, do you understand?'

'We understand, your Grace, and we wish you good-night. Pour some rum down his throat, so that he doesn't know which way up he is; what business

has a tramp like that near the master's house, pushing his nose into other people's business? He doesn't look like a half-breed, but they're all the same, who knows what Hollander, or damned Yankee, to judge by the mess he's in. Slop, slop, there's still a little bit of room in him, let him have a pull so that we can knock out of him the last bit of his memory.'

It was delirium that came out of it, it shook the man worse than a fever; and the hag who had held the light brought water in an unglazed jug, and damped the bandages on the forehead and cheeks of the unconscious man. (The theme of unconsciousness at the beginning just as at the end; the circle closes.) She was a half-Indian from somewhere in Mexico; she had a dry and long face like a mare, and sad eyes which blinked anxiously and kindly. 'Poor fellow!' she said, wrapping that heavy head in cooling rags. She squatted on the floor and blinked her eyes, clap, clap, clap, like water dripping on a brick floor.

His unconsciousness or stupor lasted for thirty-six hours; the fellow was lying with his head wrapped in wet rags, and was not aware of himself. From time to time that lanky one came in and kicked him. 'Hi, get up, you damned corpse of a dog! We ought to take him somewhere in the night, sir, and leave him

there. Let the devils, God pardon me, take him where they like.'

The master shook his head. 'That would be something. The police will get him, and wait till he can speak. No, no. When he wakes I'll have a talk with him myself, and then I'll see. Then I'll see.'

At last the hand moved, and tried to rub the forehead; he still had those rags on it, and when they slipped off something foreign and strange remained that could not be wiped away. The man sat up and rubbed his forehead hard. Tell master to come, master wants to talk to him.

Master, with thick eyebrows (according to all appearances, an important gentleman), carefully sized up that ragamuffin. No, he couldn't be a Spaniard, or he'd take more care of his shoes, even if, say, he'd only one sleeve to his shirt, his shoes would shine like an orange.

'Come va?' said the gentleman.

'Muchas gracias, señor.'

'Yankee.'

'Yes, sir. No, sir.'

'What's your name?'

The man rubbed his forehead. 'I don't know, sir.'

The Cuban wheezed with annoyance. 'And how did you get here?'

'I don't know, sir. I was drunk, wasn't I?'

'They found a revolver on you,' the gentleman challenged.

The man shook his head. 'I don't know, I don't know anything. I can't remember anything——' His face was screwed up with effort and uneasiness; he got up and made a few steps. 'No, I'm not drunk, I've only . . . like an iron band round my head.' He searched for something in his pockets; the Cuban offered him a cigarette. He only nodded his head, *gracias*; as if it were understood. No, this is no rat from a ship; say what you like, but he bears the signs of a gentleman. For instance, his hands; they're so dirty that they're a disgrace, but as he holds that cigarette—in short, a caballero. The Cuban knitted his brows. With a tramp it would be easier, and if it came to court what judge would believe a tramp?

The man eagerly smoked his cigarette, and tried to think. 'I can't remember anything,' he said, beginning to grin. 'It's a queer feeling, I tell you, to have a clear head, and yet empty at the same time. Like a white-washed room into which someone is going to move.'

'Perhaps you know at any rate what you used to be,' suggested the Cuban.

The man looked at his hands and clothes. 'I don't

know, sir; but according to what I look like——' With the smoke from his cigarette he made a kind of zero. 'I don't know anything,' he said lightly. 'Nothing, nothing wants to come into my mind. Perhaps later I shall remember——'

The Cuban looked at him closely and suspiciously. The man's face was indifferent and slightly swollen, with an expression of amusement, and something like relief."

C H A P T E R   X X I V

"YES, you're right; another case of loss of memory, another case of literary amnesia, to which we owe so many romantic and touching stories. I shrug my shoulders with you over this already familiar plot, but I can't help it; if our hero is to remain Unknown we must abolish his identity, take away his papers, unpick the monograms, and especially, sir, remove his memory, for memory is the stuff out of which is woven our own identity. Root out your memory, and you will be the man who fell from the sky, who comes from nowhere, and doesn't know where he wants to go; you will be Case X. The man who lost his memory resembles a man who has lost his conscience; even if his brains remained clear and normal, it is as if he had lost the basis of reality, and lived outside it; without memory you see, there would be no reality for us either.

Certainly as a doctor you appreciated the fact that our case of loss of memory is the result of acute alcoholic poisoning, and of a physical shock caused by that nocturnal adventure. He fell down on the ground and hurt his head, and here we are; from a medical stand-

point there can be no objections if he suffered mental injury; we have the factor of chance on which we cannot count; but the incident is too important to be left to chance, and to satisfy us it must occur as a matter of course and logically. Case X sustained a mental injury and lost, had to lose, his memory, for reasons which were in him; for him it was the only possible way, the only exit to get away from himself; it was something like an escape into another life. How it was in actual fact you will find further on; at this stage I only wished to remind you that there are deeper reasons, and more legitimate than chance.

But it is possible that even escape from one's own identity is in the nature of a normal human desire. To lose one's memory must indeed be like beginning everything again; to stop being what we are is, my friend, like a deliverance. Sometime, perhaps, you have had the experience of finding yourself in a foreign world in which you could not make yourself understood either by speech or money. It is true that you did not lose your identity, but that was of no avail; your education, social standing, name, and the other things that make up the ordinary I were of no use; you were merely an unknown man in the streets of a foreign town. Perhaps you will remember that in such

circumstances you apprehended everything with a strange and almost dreamlike intensity; deprived of all accessories you were only a man, a being, an inner man, only eyes, and heart, only amazement, helplessness, and resignation. Nothing is more lyrical than to lose oneself. Case X, who lost himself so thoroughly that he doesn't even know who he is, will be such an astonished man; life for him will pass like a hallucination, all people unknown, all things new; but at the same time everything will be seen as if through a veil of remembering that he knows it already, and that it has passed at some time through his life, but where was it, my God, when was it? He will be as if in a dream whatever he does, in vain will he fish out pieces of reality from the eternal stream of phenomena; strange how the world becomes unsubstantial if memory is wiped away.

One thing I think needs explanation, and that is the special interest of the Cuban in Case X. I don't think that he kept him in his house as an interesting psychological case; I rather believe that he was not prepared to take him on trust as a mere onlooker at that nocturnal murder. Apparently at the beginning he suspected that loss of memory is an elegant form of exploitation: if someone will take care of me my

memory can remain obscured, what was, was, and I don't know anything; but look out, and see, sir, that my memory doesn't come back. At the final end of all he might even think that Case X had done something against the law, and was interested in concealing his identity, or in having at hand evidence that he was something like a fool. So his dealings with him were cautious and circumspect; but even after he had made sure a hundred times that without doubt the man had lost his memory completely, he still was apprehensive in case he should suddenly wake from his dream and begin to talk; and so it was better to treat him well, particularly since day by day it became more and more obvious that he was a polite and obliging man. Let that stay as it is, a knowledge of languages comes handy if our business interests are widely scattered, thank God, from Caracas to Tampico; when you have to deal with Englishmen, Frenchmen, Dutchmen, and with those louts from the States, who, God curse them, won't learn Spanish all their lives; and those people from Hamburg almost expect you to correspond with them in some language of their own. The Cuban thought of this deeply while he chewed a black cigar, as thick as a banana; he had his own cigars, and he himself looked after the mulattos when they rolled

them with the palms of their hands upon their round young thighs; he chose his cigars according to the girls, more strictly speaking, according to the length of their shanks; the longer' the legs, the better the girls were grown, and the better the cigars rolled up. When he found, then, that the man whom he had taken into his house knew not only how to speak and write in those different languages, but even how to swear (various suspicious characters too frequently dropped into his house, and the Cuban was already tired of telling them what he thought of them when they didn't understand), he became enthusiastic about him, and offered him a post; from his own side the relation was something like a contract between crooks, that is hearty and almost humane. To avoid any misunderstanding, the Cuban was an old settler, of noble birth, from Camaguey, who was called Camagueyno, at one time a breeder of bulls on the savannahs; but when it became clear to him that in those miserable times it was no longer sufficient to be owner of herds and rule a house and family, he shrugged his shoulders, and went in for business something in the style of the old and famous buccaneers who played their antics among the islands. In short, *este hombre*, as he called our hero, was useful for negotiating with the victims in their

own language, and for keeping up appearances, even if it were only a matter of stripping and sinking their ships. One must choose one's men as one chooses stud bulls, with care and with a touch of the prophetic spirit. This bull certainly limps a bit, but I wager, sir, that he will leave good stock. *Este hombre* was certainly somewhat strange and bewildered, but it seemed as if he knew quite a lot. And sighing deeply, the old pirate went to consult his wife, who sat with swollen legs somewhere at the back of the house, reading her fortune with cards while sweat ran down the wrinkles of her bloated face like eternal tears. Nobody ever saw her; only from time to time, her deep bass could be heard as she cursed the negresses.

It should be pointed out that the Cuban had not only business to do with sugar, pimento, molasses, and other blessings of the islands, but chiefly and above all with affairs of all kinds. People came to him, sometimes, it is true, rather suspicious looking, the devil knows what strange races there are in the world; this one, he said, to found an export company for ginger, angostura, nutmegs, and Malagetta pepper somewhere in Tobago; that one, he said, about a bed of asphalt on Haiti; that one, he said, to export kubavi, a wood as tough as armour-plate, pipiri that never rots, Santa Maria, or

corkwood, lighter than cork from the Algerian oaks. Or to plant vanilla, cacao, sugar plantations, here and there, where labour was cheap. Or to produce starch in wholesale quantities from manihota, jams out of mombin, extract from Cassia bark. Some of them had already been in the islands for three months at least, and so they knew of all kinds of things with which one could do business, or what ought to be founded. The more experienced carried on negotiations for the import of labour, land speculation, limited companies confidentially supported by their Governments. Old Camagueyno listened with half-closed eyes, chewing his black cigar; he had a tropical liver that made him suspicious and irritable. By degrees on all the islands that the heavenly God had scattered around he had his interests, his sugar-cane and cacao plantations, his drying kilns, mills, distilleries, his square miles of forests which his associates acquired and then ran away, or went down with drink or fever. He himself hardly ever left the house, tormented as he was by his liver and lumbago; but many petty pirates, thieves, many Morenes and shameless half-breeds, sweated and hustled about, drinking hard, and practising fornication on his estates with all the demons and devils of this fiery world. In this cool and whitewashed house, where in

the patio green water murmured in Toledo faience, little was heard of that struggle without; sometimes, it is true, someone arrived with feverish eyes as gaunt as a cassia pod, and cried that he had been ruined; but for such purposes there were three mozos, erstwhile cowboys from the savannah, to show them the way out. Times were different when you rode on a horse through grass as tall as a man; there on a hillock stood an old spreading ceiba, and from its shade you could see for miles and miles; and on the slopes there were herds of black cattle. And now these people shouted for a couple of greasy dollars as if some big thing were afoot. Just the same kind of ruffians as those who had turned the savannah into a sugar factory. And instead of black bulls had introduced zebu, hunch-backed and lagging animals; zebu being cheaper. The old gentleman raised his bushy eyebrows as if he were astonished. And people like this imagine that you ought to make a tremendous fuss of them. It's all foreign, so what——"

"It was strange how it was coming out in the old lady's cards: heaps of money, and some misfortune; *este hombre* was from a rich and noble family, but then there was a woman, great vexation, and a letter. As for that woman, it was queer for in the Cuban house there was only herself and some mulattos, who, of course, didn't count. It wasn't respectable for a *señora* to prophesy and thus enter into contact with evil powers; and so an old negress was called in who knew her way about with incredibly dirty cards, rum, and incantations. When the cards were spread out, Morena began her patter so amazingly fast that the old lady hardly understood every tenth word, so that it was impossible to be certain of what was written in the heavens except again a large sum of money, a distant journey, a woman, and a dreadful misfortune, which the negress represented by pointing wildly to the floor. There was nothing there but a tiny beetle, with a metallic-looking coat, crawling slowly along; when the black prophetess pointed tragically to the floor, it drew up its tiny legs and seemed to be dead.

Nevertheless it was a warning; if the Cuban didn't

mind, it was evident that even he was moved by a deeper necessity. First he produced private papers from some man who had died in hospital; *este hombre* had to have a name, and an identity, and he could raise no objection to being called Mr. George Kettelring. Kettelring was a good name; it might have been Yankee, German, or something else, and it looked businesslike and reliable. If George Kettelring, then George Kettelring; nobody would ask where he had come from, for he didn't lead one to think that he had only come to the islands yesterday. He was called *el secretario*, but that didn't mean anything in particular; chiefly his work was to translate and write letters. When he put down the first statement I should imagine that he started; and looked fixed at what he had written; most probably it reminded him of something deeply personal that he was unable to recall; perhaps it was his lost personality preserved in the characteristics of his handwriting. From that time on he only wrote on the typewriter, mildly amused by the extent and complexity of the Cuban's commercial interests. 'Mildly amused,' that is the right phrase; whether it was a matter of business, molasses, or the profit from tobacco-fields, or collective contracts with Ceylon coolies on Trinidad, or land in San Domingo, or on Martinique, or the

sugar factory in Bermuda, or of the agency in Port au Prince, it seemed to him as if they weren't real people, real estates, real goods, real money, but as something rather funny in being so far away and unreal; as if you were telling him about the mortgage on Centauri, or the profit from the fields on Algola, or of the small gauge railway between the stars of the Boot, or of the Little Bear. From a commercial and human standpoint, it is certainly not pleasant to think of someone looking at your interests, investments, and mortgages from such an astral distance, and more than once old Camagueyno raised his irritated brows when *este hombre* Kettelring bared his teeth so strangely with pleasure on coming across some fresh name. It makes you anxious if someone treats your property with such disrespect as if it were a mere phantom or something. But the old filibuster discovered that it had its better side too. Mr. Kettelring never made the slightest sign whatever he wrote; say, to stop credits to a planter who was toiling in despair on Maria Galante, to dismiss hands, or to put a knife to someone's throat; sometimes the Cuban couldn't even get it out of his throat, he snorted, hesitated, and waited for some objection, but already the typewriter was rattling cheerfully, and *este hombre* merely raised amused eyes to inquire what

further. Camagueyno once used to have an old scribe, a Spaniard; that old fellow always got into a frightful temper when he had to write a letter like that, he would begin to cry, and run away; he came back drunk and wrote it with a face like the damned, cursing his mother as the worst of all harlots. But now everything went smoothly, devilishly smoothly, it only clicked. The old Cuban felt, I imagine, uneasy because it went like greased lightning, he needn't dictate any more, it was sufficient if he shrugged his shoulders over the letter from a poor unfortunate whose orchards had been eaten by Lima mould, Mr. Kettelring wrote it, and the farmer could go and hang himself. It seemed as if Mr. Kettelring had no conscience. Most likely conscience goes lost with memory,

But as you can imagine, there was another point relating to his memory. As you know, it is true that *este hombre* Kettelring lost his memory, with everything in it, but in return a new one was born with which he might be exhibited. He remembered word for word letters, bills, and contracts that had passed through his hands. To So-and-so we wrote a month ago this and that, in this man's memorandum of agreement there is so-and-so. A complete living repository. Chewing his eternal cigar, Camagueyno looked thoughtfully

at the inconceivable Mr. Kettelring. From time to time he pulled out of his safe in the depths of the house copies of old contracts, and commercial correspondence. Read it, he said, and Mr. Kettelring read it and remembered. The old Cuban did not set much store by such new-fangled ideas like order; besides, many of his interests were of a kind which he preferred not to commit to writing. There were some venerable pirates of equal standing with whom it was sufficient just to smoke a cigar, and then shake hands on it. But man grows old and never knows when his hour will come; and with some misgiving he began slowly to initiate Mr. Kettelring into his business, and confide to his memory what and how it was. We may take it for granted that it was not all commerce. The old country Camaguey, savannahs with herds, noble Cuban farmers of the times; the former races in Havana, the society, courtly and respectable, ladies in crinolines. Do you know that Cuban society was the most noble, and most exclusive in the world? There were only masters and servants, but no rabble. Old Cuba, Mr. Kettelring. And the old gentleman, mastering his rheumatism, showed how a cavalier used to bow to a lady, and how the lady very nearly used to kneel down before the cavalier, holding her skirts in both hands. And the

dances, chaconne, or danzon—no, none of these rumbas and sones; they were danced by the negroes, that was the orgy of Morens, and Pards, but a Cuban, sir, wouldn't let himself go like that. Not till the Yankees turned us negro. Camagueyno's eyes flared up. Even those mulattos are no longer what they used to be. What small and round little backsides they used to have! To-day they're already spoiled by American blood, bones too coarse, *señor mio*, and wide mugs only for shouting. Now they do shout, but then they only cooed, yes, cooed when they'd got it. The old gentleman waved his hand. Altogether we holloa too much; that's what the Americans have introduced. Before, we were quieter, there was more dignity——

Mr. Kettelring listened, with his eyes half-shut, and with a slight distracted smile. As if into his empty inner self the remote and knightly past was flowing like a stream."

## CHAPTER XXVI

"BUT otherwise one can well imagine that with Mr. Kettelring there could be little conversation; it seemed as if he tried to avoid people, as if he were afraid that someone might recognize him, and slap him on the shoulder. How do you do, Mr. So-and-so? When he drank, he certainly drank alone and heavily; he dropped in at the saloons where colorados went, gazed at the bespattered floor covered with fruit-stones, and fagends, and talked to himself in a language that suited his mood. I think that at times he jabbered a phrase like a wreck thrown up by the waters of Lethe; but because he must have been dreadfully drunk for such a word memory to have detached itself from the depths of his unconsciousness, he never came to any solution, and only shook his head half-falling asleep, mumbling something unintelligible even to himself. And in this the sound of the negroes' drums, tamtams, little bells, and a guitar, wild and sweaty music, a leaping cataract from which emerged a shrieking naked girl slapping her shiny hips, the neighing of a trumpet, and the soft texture of a violin, ah, as if you were stroking a

smooth back, and shoulders, a back flexed and yielding just to stick your nails into it. Mr. Kettelring stuck his nails into his sweaty palms, and shook his head, but he couldn't keep up with the pace of the black musicians, not at all, his head would fall off and roll on the floor. And why do those musicians jump so much, wait, wait, I haven't drunk enough yet not to see clearly; wait, I shall close my eyes, and when I open them, mind that you are sitting quietly, I tell you, but don't you stop playing. Mr. Kettelring opened his eyes; black musicians jumped, and showed the whites of their eyes, that one with the blaring trumpet was standing up as if he were emerging out of the darkness, and on a tiny bit of the floor a brown chabine in a flowered dress was wriggling, the olive Cuban threw a red shawl round her hips, and pressed her to himself, belly to belly, they jostled each other in a violent and cramped rhythm, the Cuban with his mouth open, and the mulatto with leaden eyes, they shuffled and hissed, showed their teeth as if they wanted to bite one another; and then another couple; and a third, it was full of them, they wriggled between the tables, they staggered, and roared with laughter, they went for one another, glistening with sweat, and pomade; and above it all the trumpet blared and droned in its sexual triumph.

See how Mr. Kettelring drums on the table and shakes his head. God, what does it remind me of, what does it remind me of? Surely once before I was just as drunk, yes just so, yes, but how did it end? In vain he tried to grasp some picture that eluded him. The eyes and teeth of the mulatto sparkled, she had a hibiscus flower in her teeth, and she rocked from her hips; Yes, I know I might go with you, but think of it; girl, I can't remember—A young man leaned over Mr. Kettelring and said something to him. Mr. Kettelring's eyes bulged. *Que vuole?* The young man with the thin neck grinned and whispered confidently. I can take you, sir, to a beautiful girl. Beautiful, coloured, he rattled, and clicked his tongue. In Mr. Kettelring something suddenly gave way; he sprang up, and hit the young man so hard in the face that he flew back, and fell on the floor among the dancers. Mr. Kettelring roared and beat his forehead with his fist. Now I shall remember—He couldn't. There was a dreadful brawl, and a still more dreadful debauch followed with some Americans, who threw out the whole saloon together with the girls and the musicians, and occupied the conquered territory; they declared that the Cubans were a band of half-breeds and negroes, and they crowned themselves with paper roses, which in that

land of flowers heightened the splendour of the Cuban saloon.

Then, arising from that, let us say, demonstrations of Cuban nationalists broke out against the Americans. The local students joined in, and waving flags striped with blue and white, they harangued fiercely against the States. Nothing could be done; the whole affair had to be officially investigated. Old Camagueyno thundered irritably amidst his clouds of smoke; on the one hand, he admitted that young people in that climate needed something to keep their spirits up, by which he meant Mr. Kettelring and the hot-headed Cuban youths; but as a business man he was for order, and as a Camagueyno for final accounts with the foreigners. He would not like to lose *este hombre* Kettelring, and what he feared most was that his identity might be disclosed at the official investigation; who knew if the police might not again take an interest in that dead man with three bullets in his skull, which had been put down to unknown rowdies from the North (for local people, as was well known, settled their own affairs with a knife; not reckoning the peons, who had gained experience in New Mexico). Ay, hijos de vacas, cobardes, cojones! Did ever such things happen in Cuba? Everyone himself, and without official aid,

looked after his own honour, there were no disputes and brawls, nobody was keen on getting stabbed. And what justice there was on Cuba! It paid due regard for property, rights, leases, and heritage settlements, and not for brawls of drunkards. The old gentleman frowned, his hairy brows deeply annoyed, and he spat brown saliva, while Mr. Kettelring, bruised and ruffled, tapped away at the typewriter. That Dutchman on Haiti is inquiring again about raising credit for building the sugar factory.

Mr. Kettelring raised bloodshot eyes. 'Last time he wrote that the erectors had nearly finished the presses; now he writes that the room for the presses hasn't got a roof on yet.'

The Cuban bit his cigar; had he not other worries now?

'Somebody ought to have a look at that building,' mumbled Kettelring, and again started rattling the machine.

The old Cuban began to snigger silently. 'That is an idea, Kettelring! Wouldn't you like to go there?'

*Este hombre* shrugged his shoulders, it was apparently all the same to him; but the Cuban veiled himself in smoke, and meditated, rocking with laughter.

'Excellent, sir, you go to Haiti. In the meantime

things will cool down here, and we need someone to look after our affairs over there. There is the agency at Port au Prince, those things in Gonaiva, and in Samana—but you know about them.' The old Camagueyno was immensely amused. I should like to know what *este hombre* will do on Haiti; it's not like Cuba, *sabe*? Most likely he will drive himself to death with rum, as long as the negresses don't shake him out of his trousers; there people get so idiotic that they don't even steal. It's true we need an able man; there's money to be made there—The Cuban grew serious. Haiti isn't Cuba; there the Americanos haven't yet stolen it by bits, nobody can stick it there, no, nobody can stand the life, but a negro. All the same, you could buy and sell there—And this man hasn't got overmuch conscience. He may stick it there; a man can stand a lot when he's got no conscience.

'I'll go,' replied Mr. Kettelring indifferently.

The Camagueyno grew lively; dipping some sort of a pear into salt, he began with a full mouth to explain what information he wanted from there. 'Drink, Kettelring, your health; and mind the women, they're quite mad after fair hair. I'm looking for land that would do for sugar-cane. I put my money on sugar, Kettelring, for ten more years I put my money on sugar-cane,

a la salud de usted! And beware of sorcerers, those cattle aren't even Christians. Yes, we shall want a warehouse in Gonaiva. I'm sending you as if you were my son, Kettelring, and I warn you, beware of those obeahos, those sorcerers. That, and see you bribe the officials, that's the chief thing.' The old Cuban sucked some dark wisdom from his cigar. 'Rather negresses than mulattos, man; a negress is at least a beast, but a mulatto is a devil. A devil, I tell you. Mind that agency in Port au Prince. Don't forget to take with you some stuff for the bugs, Kettelring, and write to me how it goes, and how it is there with the women.' "

## CHAPTER XXVII

"OF course I went to have a look round the hothouse at the Botanical Gardens to give myself an idea of tropical vegetation. Now I should be able to describe sufficiently well the Crotons, whose leaves are streaked with red and yellow, so magnificent that you might think they're poisonous; Acalyphas with its bright red leaves, the velvet foliage of Anthurium hanging over the dark pools, and smelling sweetly of decay, the bushes of black pepper, and the hard cups of Bromelias, from which spring incredibly pink or ethereally blue sprays of flowers, Pandanus standing on the tips of its roots, sharply toothed like little saws, not to speak of the palms; amongst those an ordinary individual who doesn't walk about with his head tipped back, like Gulliver when he came from Brobdignag, can't find his way about. But if I had to say concisely what I imagine a tropical country to be like, I should have to leave all that aside and burst out like Rimbaud into data geographically rather vague. 'I came to incredible Floridas, you know, where eyes of panthers, with human skins, mingle with flowers, and rainbows stretched like reins; I saw fermenting swamps where gigantic

snakes, eaten by bugs, drop from crooked evil-smelling trees; I would like to show the children those golden countries . . .'

Yes, something like that; but one would have to slash that festering jungle with the white-hot hatchet of the sun, set fire to the weeds, and beat out the sparks with a naked paw; plant batatas, or coffee trees, and build straw huts, and only then show the children these golden countries, where flowers and scents mingle, human skins and commercial agents, huge snakes, export, and labour, the blue sheen of the butterflies, and the international conventions about the supply of fruit. What an immense and exuberant bastardy, what a wild jungle; you must realize that I'm not wandering into a paradise where I should rest in the shadow of the palms, and let Nature embrace me, cover me with purple blossoms, and the scent of jasmine: alas, alas, things aren't so simple for me! I should like to peep inside to see what a hellish and acrid sauce is stewing there, made up of the sun, conjuncture, human races, and business, of wilderness and credit, of basic instincts, and civilization; my friend, not even the devil would like to stir the spoon in that saucepan. I should like to see which is fiercer, the Green Snake to which the negroes bow, or the Laws of Economics

to which we bend the knee; I know only that these two together make a jungle more fantastic than the groves of Equisetum, in which the Dinosaurs sat on eggs. There is the question whether that black chicken, scratching itself in the shadow of the sweet potatoes, will be sold at the market, or whether its head will be bitten off for the propitiation of the incensed and supreme Snake. I should like to see how the Green Snake, coiled up in his armchair, smiles into the telephone, and expedites his commercial affairs. What, the exchange in Amsterdam is weak? Well, we'll abolish the plantations on the Leeward Islands, The Green Snake is annoyed, and lashes his tail round the oceans of the world.

And I went to look up the statistics to have a whiff and see how that tropical sauce is being cooked. Taking the Antilles, you have all conceivable variations; beginning with Cuba, where only one-third are colorados and two-thirds are white (this is contrary to the classical tradition of slave countries; the right proportion is two coloured to one white), and finishing with the republic of Haiti, where in tropical despair a handful of whites live in agony among the shouting and neighing negroes. To heighten the effect, don't forget the Syrian usurers, Chinese, and coolies imported from India,

Java, or Oceanea. What an excellent idea! an imported coolie is more easily managed than local labour; just wait till the Green Snake colonizes Europe, the workers will be taken from one country to another; they will obey better, and will be interested in nothing but work and copulation.

And this hot sauce is thoroughly savoured with the salt of the earth. Every colonial power sends there its chosen specimens to represent with dignity the message of the white races. Go out into the world and teach all nations what is State and Commerce; wherever your foot falls, set up offices, and commercial agencies. Show those poor savages the blessings of civilization in the form of the ill-tempered, irritated, unhealthy men, who feel themselves in exile, and count their days and money looking forward to the time when they can come back to their aunts and cousins. They must be made to believe that on their loins rests the Dignity of the State, or its Prosperity, so that they don't drink themselves to death through nostalgia and laziness, and still hang on marking time with questions of prestige, with gossip, and with changing their sweaty shirts. A man like Camagueyno, at least, made no pretence that he represented any higher interests; he was an honest pirate, and therefore we have dwelt on him with a certain pleasure.

So we have got it thoroughly mixed up in our saucepan; British, American, French, Dutch governors, lieutenants, commercial representatives, and warehouse-keepers; beautiful creoles, and old settlers, something like a colonial aristocracy; from here we can cheerfully jump down the steps of mankind from complexions nut brown, to tealike, light coffee, down to the whiteness of leprosy. In our wardrobe we have the sombreros of the Cubans and the orange shoes of the mulattos, the shiny nakedness of Yorubas and the variegated turbans of the girls from Guadeloupe, and all this brought together from everywhere, swept up and moved from the whole world; fabulous sweepings, in which it is possible to rummage; Spanish, African, British, and French traditions in a state of anachronous exclusiveness or grotesque bastardization. Only humming-birds, toads, jungle, and tobacco, not counting the weeds, and diseases are genuine there. Others sprang up on the rubbish-heap of the human business.

These are, then, the islands of my desire, this is how I imagine them; as you see, I do not hunt for rainbow-coloured butterflies, nor do I pretend to be a dreamer flying into virgin nature to worship the sun naked and garlanded. Nothing of the sort. If I call it an escape, then it is an escape into the very centre of things,

where everything is in conflict, and where ages copulate in an addled medley of cultures. Here there is still orgy and violence, here gain is sought for convulsively and widely like fornication. Let it be, this is how mankind appears to us in the remarkable amplitude of its human . . . and inhuman qualities."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

"THAT sugar factory on Haiti I imagine to have been near a negro village called on the maps, let us say, Les deux Maries; it consisted of some partly built walls, no machines, and three hundred acres of yellow, cracked soil, grown over with jungle weed and sugar-cane of the fourth ratoon, that is, the fifth year, one without juice or sugar. The Dutchman had already discreetly disappeared some time ago, and Mr. Kettelring moved into his hut after he had the centipedes killed off. On the whole he felt content; behind his back was the jungle, a thicket of chestnut trees, kaklines, and devil trees, the little bird keskidy sang to him, and in the evening, in the evening the shining beetles swarmed out from the thicket, and the bats flitted in a zig-zag course over the dry buzzing of the sugar-cane. From the village he could hear the negroes drumming and dancing, celebrating the arrival of their new master. Mr. Kettelring sighed with relief, here, my word, you needn't have a name, and as for a memory, what could you do with it, what could you do with it? You blink with heat, or sleepiness, and have no desire to wander in time along the footpaths of reminiscence. You are

here, and that's enough; it's such a lasting, buzzing present.

He ought to have written a letter to Camagueyno to say what it looked like there, but he felt too lazy. Round the hut the convulvulus and hibiscus flourished, kasava and the mafafo banana; a hairy caterpillar crawled on a stalk, and an ant ran up and down across a huge leaf as if it had some business there. For a time it amused him to watch the lizards chasing one another on the factory wall; but then the lizards became stiff, and sat still, sat as if nailed down; if only there was a stone to throw—they would flash like lightning! But wait, I'll make you move. With his finger Mr. Kettelring beckoned to a negro who was hiding behind a wall. It was the local mayor, labour contractor, surveyor, and altogether a dignitary. 'What state of affairs is this,' says Mr. Kettelring. 'You band of thieves, you toads, get a move on and build the factory; bring here thirty men, do you understand, compris? I'll make the bullets fly, you sluggards!' Yes, and then a score of negroes swarmed on to the plot, and made a show as if they were building something; the lizards had their rest cut short, and Mr. Kettelring blinked his eyes in the quivering heat. At least something was going on; at least it seemed to him as if he were doing something;

at least he needn't look at an unfinished, miserable wall, on which a lizard sat immovable as if it were fixed to the spot. Something was going on, and days, weeks, months passed; and nights, well, at night there was palm wine, and sleep, at night there were the stars, you could exist through the night.

Now they were putting the rafters on; it was about time to begin inquiring for what purpose this huge edifice was being built. Around it nearly the whole village was messing about, old hags, young pigs, naked children, hens, every living thing, at least something was going on. But it won't be a sugar factory, there are no machines. Quick, laggards, quick, don't you see that in the corner a lizard had stopped again as if it didn't know what it was after? It might be, say, a drying-shed; a drying-shed is always handy for something.

Sometimes a neighbour came to see him on a mule, a young planter, his name was Pierre; a peasant son from Normandy, who wanted to make money there so that he could get married at home. He was gaunt, and heavy, tormented with swellings and fever, death looked out of his eyes. 'You Englishmen,' he used to say (for he took Mr. Kettelring for a Briton), 'you

know how to command; but a man who saves will never learn. No, a man who saves can't make a master. When these negroes saw that I was working with these paws of mine—it was impossible to live with them any longer. Do you think that I can order them to do something? They laugh in my face, and they do all kinds of things to me on purpose—and lazy, my God!—He trembled with hatred and disgust—‘This year they let seven acres of young coffee trees perish—I couldn’t weed it myself, could I?’—He was so embittered, he nearly cried—‘And when I go to Port au Prince to those gentlemen in white shoes who call themselves commercial representatives, and I say, I have coffee, I have ginger, I can deliver nutmegs—“We don’t want anything.” Say, Kettelring, well, why do they stay here, if they don’t want anything? Not that they’re catching flies. They behave as if I weren’t even there. And then they say: “What do you want after all? We can give you so much and so much”—a ridiculous price. And they’re Frenchmen too, Kettelring. If you knew what it is to be up there——’

Pierre swallowed heavily, and his Adam’s apple ran up and down; he scratched all over his body where the red mite itched him. ‘But this is hell,’ he growled. ‘These mulattos—they think that they’re as good as

me. "My father was an American agent, I am no nigger," these loafers say, puffing themselves up. And I slave—I have a girl in le Havre, a good girl, she's a typist in a shop; if only, sir, I could sell out and have a thousand or two francs left.' With his head in his hands, Pierre remembered how it was in his old home; he didn't even notice that Mr. Kettelring never told him any reminiscences in return, for recollection is selfish. He complained of sweat and weariness; they advised him to eat elephant lice, nuts of kashu trees, these, they said, drive weariness away, and sharpen the wits. After that, poor Pierre always had his pockets full of them, and he chewed them continually; he didn't realize that besides other things they were also aphrodisiac, and he was pining with desire for his girl. Besides, he was frightened of the negresses because he thought they were diseased, and he loathed them because he hated negroes; hadn't they ruined his seven acres of coffee? 'Say, Kettelring,' he mumbled feverishly, 'say, do you sleep with them? I couldn't——'

Once when he hadn't appeared for ten days Mr. Kettelring went to look him up. Pierre was down with pneumonia, and couldn't recognize him. 'Mon amant,' boasted the negress in the hut, a horrid woman, covered with scabs. 'Moi, sa femme, eh? Since last night.' She

neighed and slapped her thighs, while her breasts dangled.

A few days afterwards Pierre died.

Strange how people begin to be interested in a man when he's dead. Two days afterwards a couple of gentlemen arrived from below, from Port au Prince. And what will happen to the plantations of Mr. Pierre. They also called on Mr. Kettelring. They sat with him, they smeared their sores with palm olive and simaruba ointment, and cursed the whole lousy region. 'You could make money here if those nigger scum weren't as lazy as lice; how is it here with labour conditions? and what are you building, Mr. Kettelring—sugar-factory, or what?' Mr. Kettelring waved his hand contemptuously. 'Sugar, here? The country is too dry, sir. Grow cotton-wool here, that would be something. Well, to set your minds at rest, this will be a drying-shed for cotton.'

Both gentlemen stopped for a bit to smear themselves, and to kill mosquitoes on their sweaty shanks. 'Well, look here, a drying-shed for cotton—why, we're interested in cotton. A planter from New Orleans, but labour's too dear there now. Those lousy niggers up there have already got their trade unions, would you believe it? And how much arable land is there here?'

Mr. Kettelring pictured to them three hundred acres of cultivated land; it was, however, mostly a jungle, but in any case it was all the same, nobody would come to look at it. Besides, he didn't believe in any American planter who was interested in cotton, and why cotton, anyhow? The Haitian Cotton Plantation Society would be founded, and shares would be sold; the deuce take the cotton, business doesn't want any cotton; a drying-shed and land is enough for throwing on the market nicely printed shares with which a meritorious piece of work of commercial and political enterprise would be done. At the top of the shares there would be a picture of happy negroes with a perspective view of the new drying-shed in the background. Poor Mr. Pierre; his coffee trees will now be choked with weeds for good.

God knows, I should like to describe something else, the flowers of frangipans, the blossoms of marhaniks, and the brilliancy of butterfly wings; why, indeed, do I surround myself with that dreadful wall of yellow and muddy brick? Where have I got to, this is a nice tropical country for me! I might go down into my garden and enjoy campanulas in flower, and the morning freshness of the bushes; instead, I blink my eyes in the midday glare at the yellow wall of the drying-shed lined with banana skins, excrement, and rotting stalks,

and I can't deny myself a deep satisfaction. Now, at last we're here, so far, that we can prop our elbows on our knees, and laze. Well, that's how it looks, and this is reality; this wall, long and dirty yellow, baked by the sun. And so we have, praise be to God, escaped to the other side of the world.

There we left Mr. Kettelring; he was sitting in front of his hut, chewing pig plums, and frowning at the lizards fixed motionless on the wall of the drying-shed. A huge nigger from Port au Prince arrived, carrying a letter on his head. It was old Camagueyno writing, *muy amigo mio*, and so on; in short, he was rubbing his hands because he had just sold three hundred and sixty acres of cotton land near Deux Maries, a fully equipped gin-house and the drying-house included. That affair is not settled yet, wrote the Cuban; the political parties are attacking the officials and saying that they haven't yet investigated the affair. Wouldn't Señor Kettelring have a look round Gonaïva for a time.

To Kettelring it was all the same; he left the half-completed rafters standing, and had a look round Gonaïva for a time, from Gonaïva to San Domingo, he didn't care, then perhaps to Porto Rico, and after that, quicker still from one island to another, to so many places that they didn't seem real."

## CHAPTER XXX

"I'm only giving you an outline of the story of Case X, indeed, it isn't even an outline; I couldn't give a connected account of what happened to him from one year to the next. Besides, his life didn't consist of events; events necessitate will, or something, at least, that isn't indifference; but having lost his memory, Case X undoubtedly lost most of the motives that influence people. You can't conceive what an alert force our memory is; we look at the world through eyes of previous experience, we greet things like old acquaintances, and our attention is held by what captivated it once; the greater part of our relations with everything around us is tied by the fine and invisible hands of reminiscence. A man without memory would be a man without relations; he would be surrounded by strangeness, and the sound which would reach him would not contain any answers.

And yet we think of Mr. Kettelring wandering from place to place as if he were seeking something. Don't be deceived by that; he was not interested enough to be after anything, and if he had been left to himself perhaps he would have stayed sitting permanently by

that cracking wall at Deux Maries, gazing at the lizards, darting or motionless. He merely accepted the commercial interests of the Cuban Don as his own; and he was led on by them. Everywhere there was some step, or stump, where he could sit down; he followed the path of a drop of sweat running down his back; he listened to the dry rustling of the palms, or of the lebbek pods, and he was mildly amused to see how lazy people moved. It was like a kaleidoscope, and he turned it round to make them move quicker. Well, then, you niggers, get a move on so that something is being done, that something is moving before my eyes; load the ships with coconuts, carry baskets on your heads, roll barrels with pimento rum; a bit faster so that I don't put pepper on your tails. On the water in the harbour oil and dirt made rainbow colours, rainbow rings; what beautiful putrefaction, what phosphorescent corruption! And get a move on you black pigs, march into that sugar-cane and make it wave, make it ripple, that rustling field, and make it flash with naked loins among the tawny litter.

And with all this a strange thing: without caring about it, doing it all just to fill out his laziness and inertia with something, he was very likely accompanied by what in business is called success; people were afraid

of his indifferent eyes, his commands were definite, and not to be argued away, his reports to Camagueyno were a model of commercial reliability. He gave orders as if used to it from birth, and urged people in a way that made them submit with a dark and powerless rage. If they could have seen that he was enjoying his command, and that he was glorying in his power and superiority, it would have been, God knows, more tolerable; but fear and hatred merely settled on his broad and indifferent shoulders, always as if ready to shrug. Tear your guts out, or get out, it's not my affair. But quite deep down, deep down below everything, a tiny and pained astonishment was stirring, a kind of eternal numbness. Perhaps I also carried loads, or rowed in a boat, scratched my back, and ate a dirty pancake in the sand; maybe I was also a sweaty storekeeper, running with papers in my hand, or I had white breeches, and a panama hat, like I have now, and I looked after men and saw that they sweated for the sake of some other Cuban. All that was equally far away and equally unreal; it was possible to look at it as if through the wrong end of a telescope—so far it was, and so ridiculous to look at; how they all struggled, the coolies, typists, storekeepers, and gentlemen in white shoes playing tennis behind the net.

Or various gentlemen came: Camagueyno's agents, and representatives, planters laden down with mortgages, directors of sugar factories, small and robust farmers; Hello, Mr. Kettelring, my wife would feel honoured to invite you, and, Mr. Kettelring, what about a cocktail. Soon their tongues faltered before the indifferent eyes of Mr. Kettelring; short crops, they said, bad markets, those thieves the mulattos, and such like. Mr. Kettelring didn't even wait to let them finish, he was bored. You will do so-and-so, sir, bring me a report, I will go and look for myself. They shuffled before him from one foot to the other, perspired humbly, and convulsively, intensely hating this their lord, who, without long harangues in the Cuban's name, put the knife to their necks. And all the time Mr. Kettelring was exploring in himself such a strange and uneasy possibility. Perhaps this was my previous, my real, self. Perhaps I was a slave-driver with a whip, a planter, or something, a man in charge of property, and therefore also of people; how could I manage them like this if it weren't in me? Perhaps it will come out stronger if I try it on others; perhaps it will hurt inside me sometimes when I strike a man, and I shall realize suddenly that I was like that.

If we pay no attention to external events, he led a double life, of boredom and intoxication, and there was nothing more, nothing else; only boredom passed over to intoxication, and intoxication to boredom. Boredom which is the most dreadful and the ugliest prose; boredom which almost with satisfaction pastures on everything that is repulsive, monotonous, stale, and hopeless, which lets slip no stench, and decay, which follows the way of the bed-bug, the juice of corruption, sneaking cracks in the ceiling, and the vanity or foulness of life. And intoxication. Whether it be intoxication by rum, boredom, lust, or heat, if only it all mixes up, let the senses run into one another, let us be governed by an enraged enthusiasm; let us take it in all at once, all at once into our mouths and into our hands, so that we can gorge on it greedily, and squeeze out the juice till it runs over our chins—breasts and fruit, cooling foliage, and red-hot fire; when nothing has limits we have none, and everything that moves moves in us—in us the swaying of the palm-trees and of the hips, in us the dazzling sun, and the eternal weeping of water; out of the way, make room for the man who is so great and drunk that everything is in him. The stars, and the rustling of the tree-tops, and the open gates of the night. What landscapes are they pictured by intoxication, or boredom;

dead landscapes stuck with dryness, with rotting fermentation, flies, stench, sticky dirt and decomposition, or again reeling landscapes, heaped with suns, rut, smells, and fiery tastes, sultry flowers, water, and dizziness. Listen, with boredom, and intoxication, a decent hell with all it contains can be circumscribed, so vast that even paradise is inside—paradise with all its wonder and brilliance, with all the delights, but that is the deepest hell, for it is just from there that disgust and boredom arise.”

C H A P T E R   X X X

"LET us take at random: Haiti, Porto Rico, Barbuda, Guadeloupe, Barbados, Tobago, Curaçao, Trinidad, Dutch agents, British colonial cream of society, naval officers from the States, sceptical and untidy French bureaucrats; and everywhere creoles chattering in patois, negroes, *filles de couleur*, many brutal people, more unhappy ones, and most of those who in some way or other tried to preserve their respectability against drink, prurience, and sexual mesalliances. Case X, as far as possible, preferred to stick to the trodden paths; in spite of which there were perhaps weeks and months when he lived under a straw roof, in a hut supported on beams like a dovecot, to keep away from crabs and centipedes, on the edge of a forest which creaked in the wind, or smoked after a sultry downpour: here, enthroned on the wooden steps, he had the sand lice picked out from the soles of his feet, and he took steps to see that another hundred acres of virgin nature were ready to bear the pith and fruit of the plant called Prosperity. Then blessings would settle on the country in the shape of negroes, who would have to work harder than before, but still remain as miserable as

ever; in return, in some other part of the world, the pith and fruit of the fields would cease to pay the peasants. That is the way of things, and to Mr. Kettelring it was all the same; if sugar-cane, then sugar-cane; let the axes ring, the gnats buzz, and the negroes bray, and at the end all this will be nicely sifted, and straightened out to the clicking of the typewriters. No, these aren't typewriters, they're frogs, cicadas, it's a bird hammering with his beak on a tree. No, it is not a bird, or rustling of stalks, it's the sound of a typewriter, and Mr. Kettelring sat on the floor and hammered with his finger at a rusty typewriter. Only a business letter, Cubans, nothing else, but that miserable machine was so eaten with damp and rust—somehow Kettelring felt relieved. What is one to do, I can't type this letter, all right, I'm coming back.

So he was coming back to Cuba, having done well over the profit from sugar-cane on the islands; he was returning on a big-bellied boat, laden with vanilla, pimento, and cacao, mace and tangerines, angostura and ginger, on a boat full of odours, trusty like a shop with colonial goods; it was a Dutch boat puffing from one port to another like a gossipy aunt who stops in front of every shop and has too much to say. No hurry,

sir, hands in your pockets, and have a look. At what? Well, at the water, at the sea, at the track of the sun that is drawn on it; or at the islands with their blue shadows, at the clouds lined with gold, at the flying fishes as they splash about the sparkling water. Or in the evening at the stars; then the bellied captain would appear, offer a fat cigar; he also had not too much to say. After all, it would not be so bad to remain just Mr. Kettelring.

All the time there was some kind of a storm on the horizon, at night there were broad red flashes of lightning behind a veil of rain; or the sea became iridescent with pale and bluish stripes that ran apart and suddenly faded away; and below in that black seething water something was phosphorescent all the time with its own light. Mr. Kettelring leaned against the rail and was filled with a feeling that was neither boredom nor intoxication. Yes, that at least was certain; he had sailed once before just like that, and felt just as happy and free. Now he was storing it up in himself so that he would not forget it again. To spread out his arms with longing. With that immense feeling of love, freedom, or something.

Camagueyno welcomed him with open arms; the old

pirate knew how to show acknowledgment when a vessel was returning laden with booty. He no longer sat with Mr. Kettelring in the office, but in a shady room at a table covered with damask, English glass, and jugs with heavy silver heads, he poured out red wine for him, and—apparently out of respect—he tried to talk to him in English. The room opened with slender arches and small columns into a patio inlaid with majolica; in the middle a fountain murmured, surrounded by small palms and myrtles in faience pots, like somewhere in Seville. Señor Kettelring was now a valued guest. ‘My house belongs to you,’ said the Cuban with old Spanish grandeur, and inquired after his travels and return as if they were the rambles of a nobleman just for pleasure. Mr. Kettelring, of course, had not sufficient tradition for those formalities, and he talked business. There and there it looks like this, that debtor is bad, that concern there may have a future, and is worth watching. Camagueyno nodded. ‘Very well, sir, we will talk about that again,’ and he waved his hand. ‘Well, well, there’s time enough.’ He had grown much older, more respectable, more foolish than he used to be; his bushy eyebrows run up and down on his forehead. ‘And your health, my dear Kettelring, your health.’ He giggled excitedly, ‘And

what about the women, how is it there with the women?"

Kettelring was astonished. 'Thanks for asking, it wasn't so bad. With regard to that land on Trinidad, it's a damned swamp; but if it were drained—'

'Is it true,' wheezed the Cuban. 'Is it true that on Haiti the negresses are as if they were mad when—when those pagan fiestas of theirs are on? Eh?'

'It is,' said Kettelring. 'Absolutely mad, sir. But the best chabines are on Guadeloupe.'

Camagueyno bent towards him. 'And what about the Hindoo women, what are the Hindoo women like? Are they muy lascivas? They have, they say—some secret cults, is it true? You must tell me everything, my dear Kettelring.'

A girl entered the room in a white dress. The Cuban got up, raising his eyebrows impatiently almost to his hair. 'This is my daughter, Maria Dolores, Mary; for she has been to a university in the States.' It was as if he wanted to apologize for her; for a Spanish girl would never enter a room where there was a foreign caballero. But Mary was already shaking hands in the American fashion. 'How do you do, Mr. Kettelring?' She pretended to be more bony and angular than she really was, she wanted to look English; at the same

time she was pale olive, and black like pitch, her brows joined together, and there was down under her nose—a genuine and good Cuban maiden.

‘Well, Mary,’ said Camagueyno, to indicate that she might go; but Mary was an independent American girl, she sat down and crossed her legs, and shot at Mr. Kettelring one question after the other. What is it like on the islands? What about the social conditions of the negroes? How do they live, what are their children like, what of the health conditions? Mr. Kettelring was silently amused by her schoolgirl energy, while Camagueyno raised shocked eyebrows like two huge hairy caterpillars. And Mr. Kettelring lied like a school book: Lovely islands, Miss Mary, perfect paradise; all virgin forest with colibrees fufu, vanilla grows there by itself, you have only to pick it; and as for the negroes, one can’t complain, they have a good time like children. . . .

The American girl listened, holding her knees, and never took her eyes away from that man who had come straight from paradise.”

C H A P T E R   X X X I

"IN the evening Camagueyno soon excused himself, tormented by pain in his gall-bladder; he really looked miserable, and his eyes sank deep with pain. Mr. Kettelring went out into the garden to smoke a cigar; there was a smell of nutmeg, acacias, and volcameria, and big moths fluttered as if they were drunk. A white girl was sitting on a majolica seat breathing the unbearably sweet air through her half-closed lips. Mr. Kettelring avoided her in a respectable curve, he knew what was seemly. And suddenly the cigar flew into a thicket of oleanders. 'Señorita,' said Kettelring quickly, and almost roughly, 'I am ashamed of myself; I was lying to you, it is like hell down there, and don't let them make you believe that a man can remain a man there.'

'And you will go back?' she inquired in a low voice; night softens the voice.

'Yes. Where else should I go?' She made room for him beside her. 'Perhaps you know that I have . . . no home anywhere. I have nowhere to go back to unless it is there.' He waved his hand. 'I'm sorry to have spoiled your picture of a paradise. But no, it is not so bad.' He tried to think of something beautiful. 'Once

I saw a Morphos butterfly; just a yard in front of me, he was fluttering with those blue wings of his, he was a beauty. He was sitting on a dead rat, full of maggots.'

The university girl straightened herself up severely.  
'Mr. Kettelring——'

'I am not Mr. Kettelring. Why, why should I always lie. I'm nobody. I think that a man who has no name has no soul either. That's why I could stand it there, *sabe?*'

And suddenly it wasn't a university girl, but a small Cuban, blinking her long lashes in pity. *Ay de mi*, what to say to him, what can I say nice to him? Best run home, for he's so strange; cross myself and get up—No, an American girl can't do that, an American girl would be his comrade; didn't we study psychology. I can help him to find his lost memory, to bring out his suppressed notions; but first I must win his confidence—In a friendly manner the American girl held his hand. 'Mr. Kettelring—or what shall I call you?'

'I don't know, I am that man.'

She squeezed his hand to give him a lead. 'Try, try to think of your childhood. You **MUST** remember something—at least your mother, don't you? You are remembering, aren't you?'

'Once I . . . I had a fever. That was on Barbuda. An old negress treated me with compresses of black pepper cooked with pimento. She put my head on her lap, and hunted for lice. Her hand was as wrinkled as a monkey's. I had the feeling then that she was like my mother.'

The little Cuban felt like tearing her fingers away from his. He had such a warm hand; but that perhaps wouldn't be right, it was dreadful how uncertain one was about such things. 'So you do remember your mother!'

'No, I don't know. I think I never had one.'

The American girl was firmly determined to help him. 'You must try a bit more. Remember something about when you were a boy. Some games, friends, any little thing—'

He shook his head doubtfully. 'I can't remember.'

'Something at least,' she urged. 'Children have such strong impressions!'

He tried to do as she said. 'Always when I look at the horizon it seems to me that there must be something beautiful beyond it. That's a childish idea, isn't it?'

'You thought of that at home?'

'No, here on the islands. But at the time I felt . . . as if I were a boy.'

He held her by the hand, and ventured further.  
'Listen, I have . . . stolen a ball.'

'What ball?'

' . . . A child's,' he mumbled in confusion. 'It was in Port of Spain, in the harbour. It rolled under my feet. . . . A red and green ball. As a child I must have had one like it. Ever since then I've carried it about with me—'

Tears came into her eyes. God how stupid I am! 'So you see, Mr. . . . Mr. Kettelring,' she breathed excitedly, 'it will come, you'll see. Close your eyes and think, will you? Try to remember terribly hard—but you must close your eyes to concentrate.'

Obediently he closed his eyes, and sat motionless as if he had even been told to do that. And there was silence, only the hum of drunken moths could be heard, and in the distance the squeal of a mulatto.

'Are you thinking?'

'Yes.'

Holding her breath, the little Cuban leaned towards his face. How strange he was, how severe he looked with his eyes closed; tormented and dreadful. Suddenly his face relaxed.

'Have you remembered anything?'

He sighed with deep relief. 'It's so beautiful here!'

She had to fight with an absurd impulse; and still it burst out of her, although she didn't want to say it: 'Here . . . it's not like hell here?'

'It's not like hell here,' he whispered. He was afraid to move his hand, or to open his eyes. 'It is so new to me. Do you understand, I didn't like THEM.'

God knows which understood first, the American girl, or the small black Cuban; but she pulled away her hand, and felt a hot wave sweep over her face. What a good thing that it was so dark.

'Did you . . . like anyone BEFORE?' God, how dark it is!

He shrugged his heavy shoulders.

'You couldn't help remembering THAT. . . .' This was said by the American girl for the Cuban knew that it wasn't right to talk like that with a stranger. But even the big American student was puzzled; up there, in the girls' college, didn't they talk about everything; and with young men you could talk openly about anything—God knows why it was so difficult now. She cooled her cheeks with the back of her hand, and she bit her lips.

'Mr. Kettelring?'

'Yes.'

'You must have loved a woman. Can you remember?'

He was silent, leaning forward over his knees. Now it was the little Cuban who so anxiously blinked her long eyelashes. 'Never,' he said slowly, 'have I felt what I do now. That I know, that I know for certain.'

The little Cuban could not breathe, her heart was beating so, her knees were trembling so. That is how it is, gracious God, and it is so beautiful that you feel like crying. But the American brains snatched at that sentence, and quickly turned it over. Yes, it is like this, and I realized it at once, as soon as he said: 'Señorita, I lied to you.'

'I am so glad,' she said, and her teeth chattered slightly, 'that' (well, what?)—'that you like it here.' (No, it's not that, but it's almost the same.) 'I like this garden so much, I sit here every evening——' (God, that was stupid!) The American girl tried to get on top. 'Look here, Mr. Kettelring, I will help you to remember, do you want to? It must be dreadful if you can't remember who you are.' Mr. Kettelring jumped as if he had been struck. 'I mean,' said the American girl, trying to cover herself, 'that I should be so glad if I could help you! Please——' She touched his sleeve with her finger. (Only to flirt a bit before I go! Just to go home better!)

He got up. 'I beg your pardon. I will accompany you.'

She stood before him, as close as if she were holding him with both hands. 'Promise me that you will remember!' He smiled. At that moment he seemed so beautiful to her that she nearly cried out with happiness.

She leaned from the window into the scented night; on the balcony above the red-hot fire of a cigar was glowing.

'Hello, Mr. Kettelring!'

'Yes?'

'You're not asleep?'

'No.'

'I'm not either,' she communicated happily, and leaned out with her bare arms into the night. Take, stroke, press my shoulders, here I am; feel here how my heart beats.

No, I'm not looking, I daren't; see I even throw my cigar away into the darkness so that you won't see how my teeth chatter. Damn, Mary don't stroke your shoulders, for it's as if I were doing it.

. . . I know, I feel it. You have burning hands as if they were lying in the sun. Why is it that my fingers tremble so much? And yet I'm quiet, quite quiet. I KNEW that it would come. When did I find it out? You needn't know everything. As soon as I came into the

room, and you got up—so tall, and he doesn't even know who he is.

The man above on the balcony sighed.

Oh, Mr. Kettelring, please, don't be silly; but this is very fine of you. One might take you by the hand, and say: Dear lil' boy, whose are you? I should have kissed you on the spot, or something. Maternal instinct, I guess.

Thanks—politely.

No, don't you believe it. I was afraid of you. You are so mysterious and dreadful—as if you wore a mask. Altogether exciting. I very nearly ran away when you spoke to me in the garden; it was a fright.

I beg your pardon. I didn't mean, in fact——

But I wanted you to come; you didn't realize? These Spanish customs are stupid that won't let me sit with you at dinner. We have almost to steal a meeting . . . and at once it's so strange; my heart beats as if it were a sin or something. Hello, are you still there?

Yes, here I am, here. Don't look, or I shall jump down, Maria Dolores.

Quickly she covered her arms with a silk shawl; now again she was a black Cuban, sweetly blinking her long eyelashes into the darkness; she didn't think of anything, merely waited.

Do you realize that a man meets very few white women down there; you don't know what a miracle it is to have suddenly that fine and dreadful feeling of respect. The desire to kneel down, and not even dare to raise your eyes. Ah, señorita, what wouldn't I do if you gave me your handkerchief, I should fall on my knees, and be happy to the end of my days.

The Cuban girl's eyes sparkled, and slowly, slowly the shawl slid from one shoulder; only a narrow strip of a dim arm, but it was more than ever—Perhaps a bat had fanned her in its zig-zag flight; she shivered, crossed her hands on her breast, and was gone.

And then, already day was breaking, in the garden God's birds peeped, still from sleep; the American student stole silently, cautiously to the window, and looked towards the balcony. Yes, the little red fire of the cigar is glowing there too, that man was standing there motionless, clutching the rail in his hand; and the girl's heart ached with happiness.

After that she sat for a long time on the edge of her bed, and smiled in ecstasy down at her white round legs."

## CHAPTER XXXII

"I CAN'T think it out in any other way; she didn't see him at all next day, it was as if on purpose; Camagueyno dragged him away to the office and somewhere to dinner. He vaguely reported this and that; and now it was the Cuban who had to ask questions to make him talk business, and even then he mixed up one thing with another, and Barbuda with Trinidad. The Cuban fixed on him his hollow scrutinizing eyes and laughed lightly, although he was tormented with pain. Again the two of them had supper alone; the Cuban was quite yellow with pain, but he showed no inclination to get up, he only kept on pouring out the rum. Drink, Kettelring, the devil, do drink! And how is it with sugar on Haiti? Kettelring's memory wasn't as good as it had been before, he paused, and stammered—Well, drink, man! At the end Kettelring got up, taking care not to stagger. 'I'm going into the garden, sir. My head aches.'

Camagueyno raised his eyebrows. 'Into the garden? As you please.' Again that splendid gesture as if it all belonged to the valued guest.

'By the way, Kettelring, how is your memory?'

'My memory, sir?'

The Cuban's eyes narrowed. 'Can't you still say— who you really are?'

Kettelring spun round quickly. 'I think, sir, that I'm known well enough . . . as Mr. Kettelring.'

'True,' mumbled the Cuban, gazing thoughtfully at his cigar. 'Stupid that you don't even know if you haven't . . . say . . . been married already a long time, isn't it?' He raised himself with difficulty, and pressed his hand to his side. 'Good night, Mr. Kettelring, I wish you good night.'

Kettelring did stagger a little as he stepped into the garden. A pale and excited girl, wrapped in a shawl, was waiting for him; behind her in the shadow stood that old Mexican Indian, whose eyes blinked anxiously and kindly. Oh, *duena*, understood Mr. Kettelring, but otherwise everything danced before his eyes: huge shadows, the pink inundation of the flowering corallitas, an intense scent, and the girl in a folded shawl. She took him by the arm, and dragged him into the lower part of the garden. 'Think of it,' she chattered excitedly. 'They wanted to stop me from coming here!' She was immensely offended like an American girl, but her clenched fists were Cuban. 'I shall do what I like,' she threatened fiercely, but it wasn't true. This, at least,

she didn't want to do, she did not intend: that in the deepest shade, in the shade of the hibiscus, her shawl should fall to the ground, and that she should hang on the neck of that man who staggered with despair. She raised her face to his, her mouth painfully open with the desire for a kiss. 'Señorita, India,' he murmured warningly, and pressed her in his arms, but she only shook her head; she offered him her mouth, the damp shadow of her mouth to drink of her; stiff, beyond herself, with glazed eyes. Suddenly she collapsed in his embrace, exhausted, with limp arms. He let her go; she staggered, her face in her hands, defenceless, surrendered. He picked up her shawl, and put it round her shoulders. 'Mary,' he said, 'you must go home now; and I—I shall come back. Not as Mr. Kettelring, but as someone who will have the right to come for you. Did you understand?'

She stood with her head bowed. 'Take me with you—now, at once!'

He put his hand on her shoulder. 'Go home, God knows how much more difficult it is for me than it is for you.' She let herself be led back, if only she could feel that heavy hot hand on her shoulder.

A tall peon stepped out from the thicket. 'Va adentro, señorita,' he commanded hoarsely. 'Pronto!'

She turned her face to Kettelring: her eyes shone, God knows with what. ‘Adios,’ she said silently, and gave him her hand.

‘I shall come back, Mary,’ murmured *este hombre* desperately, fumbling her fingers. She bent down quickly and kissed the back of his hand with moist lips; he could have shrieked with terror and love.

‘Va, va, señorita,’ said the peon huskily, and stepped back. She pressed that hand strongly to her heart, and offered her face. ‘Adios,’ she whispered, and kissed him with her mouth and face full of tears.

The old Indian took her by the waist. ‘Ay, ay, señorita, va a la casa, va a la casa.’

She let herself be led away as if blind, trailing the fringe of her shawl on the ground.

Kettelring stood motionless like a black post and pressed in his hand a small lace handkerchief, with a penetrating scent. ‘Va, señor,’ growled the vaquero almost soothingly.

‘Where is Camagueyno?’

‘He is waiting for you, sir.’ The peon struck a match on his trousers to light Kettelring’s cigar. ‘This way, sir.’

The old Cuban was sitting at the table, adding up money. Mr. Kettelring looked at him for a while, and then grinned. ‘That is for me, isn’t it?’

Camagueyno raised his eyes. 'That is for you, Kettelring.'

'Salary, or a share of the profits?'

'Both. You can add it up.'

Kettelring stuffed the money into his pocket. 'But to let you know, Camagueyno,' he said as distinctly as he could, 'I shall come back for her.'

The Cuban drummed with his fingers on the table. 'Unfortunately in Kettelring's papers it states that he is married. What is one to do?'

'Kettelring won't come back again,' said *este hombre* slowly.

Camagueyno winked at him with amusement. 'Well, sure, personal papers aren't expensive, they can be bought, can't they? For a couple of dollars——'

*Este hombre* sat down without invitation, and poured himself a drink, he was more sober now than ever. 'Let's suppose, Camagueyno. Let's suppose that it wont go any other way. But a very good estate would be like a very good name, don't you think so?'

The Cuban shook his head. 'With us in Cuba a good name is worth too much.'

'About how much?'

The Cuban smiled. 'Eh, Kettelring—I can still call you that?—you know how much my estate amounts to.'

Kettelring whistled. 'Do talk sense, Camagueyno. Of course, I can't earn as much as that in all my life.'

'Of course not,' agreed the Cuban, and sniggered. 'Those times are not any longer, and they won't be.'

Kettelring again poured himself a drink, and thought deeply. 'That's true, sir. But if it happened that your estate got a good deal smaller in a couple of years—then it would be easier to catch up, wouldn't it?'

They both looked closely at one another. So, now the cards were on the table.

'Let's suppose, Camagueyno, that somebody knows your affairs and contracts through and through—many things could be done with that.'

The Cuban reached for the bottle of aguardiente, not minding his liver. 'Without money,' he said, 'nothing can be done.'

Kettelring pointed to his pocket. 'This will be enough for the beginning, sir.'

Camagueyno laughed and showed his long yellow teeth: but his eyes had narrowed to evil and deep loopholes. 'I wish you great success, Kettelring. I gave you a lot of money, didn't I? Well, what's to be done. A la salud!'

Kettelring got up. 'I shall come back, Camagueyno.'

'Adios, muy señor mio.' Camagueyno bowed in the

old Cuban fashion when a valued guest was being taken to the door. 'Good night, sir, good night.'

The tall peon banged the rails behind Kettelring. 'Good night, sir.' And Case X walked away among the flowering hedges of bougainvilleas, along the path that glittered in the starry night like the milky way."

## CHAPTER XXXIII

"Now it was no longer an indifferent man whose indolent eyes gazed at the changing kaleidoscope of harbours and plantations; but a man who went to conquer, a pugnacious fellow with his head held erect; his spirit on fire, and his taut muscles almost humming. As if he had been born afresh. But isn't this the supreme sexual element in love? Aren't we really born from the breasts and lap of the woman we love, and doesn't this womb cry out for us because it desires to bear us. Now you are mine because in tremors I gave you birth, young and beautiful. And isn't the attainment of love like the beginning of a new and complete life? You call it illusion; but has illusion a source less deep than disappointment?

And so let us go on with him, first to Haiti: there was a swamp there in which it was said there were deposits of black bitumen; but that swamp, they said, smelt so strongly that not a bird, toad, or negro could bear to stay near it. He rode there on a horse—say, from Gonaiva, but he had to leave the horse behind, and with his niggers hack his way, lacerated with thorns, and cut with the high grass which was as sharp as a

razor. The negroes ran away, he had to fetch them back, and pay them double; in spite of the attractive wage two fell out on the way, one bitten by a snake, and the other, the deuce knows. He was all screwed up with cramp, and he breathed his last with a yellow scum on his mouth; some poison maybe, but the negroes thought that *djambios* had done it, and they didn't want to go any further. At last he reached the swamp, and saw that it was not so bad; there were clouds of gnats, so a living creature could exist there. It was a dreadful place, black and close, roasting in the glare of the sun; in places it bubbled forth a yellow foamy pus, and there the smell was unbearable. He went back to Gonaiva, bought the land, and made a contract with some thievish mulatto to build for him a road to the 'Asphalt lake,' as he called it rather ostentatiously; and after that he went away, say, to Porto Rico.

Well, and now he got down to it: he decided to go for Camagueyno, that is for sugar. Before he used to write to the old Cuban and say that sugar would go down, but Camagueyno wouldn't believe it. The great conjecture in sugar has had its day; let me tell you that it will make the old fox tremble. He knew of people who would gladly buy Camagueyno's lands, shares, or this or that concern; he went to them, and asked

how much they would like to give. All right, I give you my word that you will get it for half if you will pay me so much commission. The Cuban is up to his ears in sugar-cane, and he will have to sell helter skelter to scramble out; but we must work him down yet. And then he rushed, let us say, to Barbuda, Terre-Basse, Barbados, Trinidad; he found that the Cuban was already getting the wind up, and was beginning to sell to save his cash. Kettelring threw himself into the fray with his chin stuck out and his sleeves rolled up. Wait, you wait; offer him one quarter, terminate your contracts, tell him to lick your feet; what is ahead is nothing but a crash worse than ever before. You will be able to buy a sugar factory for the price of scrap iron, and plantations for a handful of pig beans. And the price of sugar is falling, a third of last year's crop is still in store; what can they do with it, they can't even use it for fuel, only sweeten the Atlantic Ocean with it; it will be a nice sweet mash, gentlemen.

It was like an avalanche, every man jack began to run away from sugar (they really did), and sell what they had, or what they hadn't. Well, now old Camagueyno could look for buyers for his sugar factories, and plantations. It is true the old man defended himself well, but in his offers you could also sense a panic;

I should like to see how his bushy brows jumped up and down. Well, it'll pull down a lot of other people with it, but it can't be helped; did anyone think of poor Pierre? Old planters went about with long faces, not understanding what was going on; nobody would give them anything for their cane, for their coffee, vanilla went for a mere song, bananas perished with Panama disease; and they couldn't even turn their backs on the islands because there was no one interested in the land either to hire or to buy it. And some years ago this was called the Golden Antilles.

In the end Camagueyno gave up the fight; he had a nose good enough not to wait for the worst, and he sold, as they say, at any price.

The beast, he still got away with a third of his fortune, Mr. Kettelring sighed with satisfaction; little was left of the commissions that he had negotiated, for a life like that is expensive and showy, and here and there he had to be lavish in helping on the course of events. Now the turn of the asphalt was coming. Everybody can't grow asphalt like sugar-cane, or cacao. You can put your money on asphalt. I'm putting my money on black against white.

And he ordered retorts and barrels, he bought an old light railway complete, and moved back to Haiti.

Dear doctor, I shall feel happier when I'm at home again—the scent of thyme, the smell of juniper, and Carthusian pinks in my hand; strange how foreign lands fill you with disquiet. I certainly should be revolutionary if I didn't live on my native soil; here (I mean on the islands) I feel the injustice, and horror of things, stronger . . . or at least with more hatred than at home. If I were really to write my story, a man with an open shirt, and with a gun slung on his shoulder, wouldn't be missing, that partisan, that avenger, that passionate antagonist of all Kettelrings, would be myself. It's no use, I must give it up; and when I sit at home again on a bank with flowers, and rub in my fingers the sweet scent of resignation, horror and hatred will melt away, and I shall drop the wild flower, the northern flower, over the grave of a half-breed in an open shirt who fell somewhere on the islands fighting against the Laws of Economics."

## CHAPTER XXXIV

"THEN the destiny of Case X got mixed up. Suppose that the mulatto contractor left the road unfinished, and ran away, enticed by the star of a variety dancer. Mr. Kettelring began to build the road himself, and spent a lot of money on it because he was in a hurry. He couldn't make the negroes carry stones in wheelbarrows, those black longshanks put the boulders on their heads and carried them as if they were baskets of pineapples; and the wheelbarrows were only good for giving a ride to shrieking wenches kicking their legs. Oh, to punch their faces and make them realize that life isn't just for their cackling guffaw! Behind the columns of workers moved crowds of girls, at night they swayed with their buttocks to the sound of guitars and tamtams, while Kettelring was gnawed with desperate impatience. He daren't even urge those louts on as much as he would have liked; the economic crisis hit Haiti too, with the strange result that the negroes indulged to an unprecedented extent in fetishes, and each week they brayed and raved in the clearings in the forest; they came back like shadows exhausted and wild, and Kettelring never let his revolver go from his hand, even at night, as he listened to the

tapping of their bare paws. Not far away two or three children went lost, and Kettelring was careful not to try to get to the bottom of the affair; and the black police from Gonaiva, barefooted, and with golden epaulettes, who came to investigate the case, were also careful not to discover a certain stone altar in the jungle to which led well-trodden paths.

Month after month slipped by, and with them Kettelring's funds and health melted away; he suffered from boils and fever, but he didn't go away to get better lest the band of negroes should disperse. He watched over them with evil eyes, sunken with hatred, and he only hissed his commands. The road was still unfinished when he settled down at the asphalt swamp in a hut, built on piles, to direct the building of the light railway; but in the meantime people had stolen the rails lying in the harbour at Gonaiva, God knows what use anyone could make of them. The whole place smelt of sulphurated hydrogen, and it fermented with a yellow suppuration like an immense disintegrating ulcer; it exuded heat like a kettle of boiling tar, and every step hung with the semi-fluid, trembling, squelching bitumen.

At last the road dragged itself to the swamp, and Kettelring went to Port au Prince to hunt for credit,

get the lorries, and barrels, hire drivers and overseers. When he came back there wasn't a single soul alive on the spot; the devil himself, they said, had appeared in the middle of the swamp and lashed up all the slush until it had boiled like jam. With great trouble he got together a handful of mangy sickly negroes with inflamed eyes, full of flies, and they began to dig the asphalt. It was a glossy black glance-pitch of first-rate quality. It was worse with the lorries; one was ruined by a mulatto who was bringing retorts and barrels from Gonaiva; the other ran into the swamp, and in a few days it disappeared under the surface; only one was left to transport the asphalt to the harbour. Kettelring took charge of the retorts to see that the pitch was well boiled up; he was black and dirty like a stoker, and he shivered with malaria by that hellish fire; they all had it there, so what about it. He didn't even take in his hands that little lace handkerchief so as not to make it dirty; he thought of nothing but the barrels full of asphalt. Well, now things were on the move, and with eyes scorched by the heat and with his feverish finger Kettelring outlined in the air the factories that were going to stand there. Harti Lake Asphalt Works, or something like that.

Of course there were vexations. That mulatto who

takes the barrels to Gonaiva. Always breaking down, and yet he bares his teeth at your face. A bad car, sir, and a bad road. Kettelring threw him out, and then he drove himself, he rattled to the harbour with full barrels, and was pleased to see how they were piling up. Hundreds of barrels, hundreds, and more hundreds, how lovely! But that mulatto who had been given the sack was not just anybody, he had seen a bit of the world; he prowled round the Haiti Lake Asphalt Works with an open shirt and held discussions about labour conditions and impudent foreigners, until one day four niggers came to Kettelring, they nudged one another, and shuffled—in short, either he must take that mulatto back to work, or—

Kettelring reddened. 'Or what?' This question he asked while he moved the safety-catch on his revolver.

A strike followed. An organized strike as well as cannibalistic rites, but that's how it is to-day. Only a few people stayed there, so ill that they couldn't get home on foot. It seems that Kettelring went mad; he snatched up a pickaxe and, up to his knees in mud, he began himself to hack out chunks of asphalt, and hissing and wheezing with the strain he dragged them to the retorts, while the sick ones gazed at him with open mouths, and were too afraid to take a spade in their

hands. When he had hauled out sufficient to fill a retort he broke into tears. ‘Pierre, Pierre!’ he sobbed, and beat his head. Then the sick ones ran away too.

For two days longer Kettelring sat by the deserted lake of asphalt, and watched how slowly the excavated pits filled up again. Thousands, hundreds of thousands of tons of asphalt. Hundreds and hundreds of barrels waiting for a buyer. Then in that lace handkerchief he wrapped a chip of raw asphalt and a bit of the refined, shining like anthracite, and he rattled with the empty lorry down to Port au Prince. There he slept for forty-eight hours as if he were dead.

And again he came in front of the wrought-iron railings of the Cuban’s house, and knocked; Open, open! The tall peon stood behind the railings, but he didn’t open the door. ‘Que desea, señor?’

‘I want to speak with Camagueyno, but at once,’ wheezed Kettelring. ‘Open, man!’

‘No, señor,’ murmured the old peon. ‘I have been ordered not to let you in.’

‘Tell him,’ gasped Kettelring, ‘tell him that I have business for him, a tremendous business.’ And he rattled the two bits of asphalt in his pocket.

‘Tell him——’

‘No, señor.’

Kettelring rubbed his forehead. 'Could you—deliver a letter—'

'No, señor.'

There was silence. In the evening air there was the scent of corallita in flower.

'Buenas noches, señor.'

And down again, down round the islands: Porto Rico, Barbuda, Guadeloupe, Barbados, Trinidad, and Curaçao: Yankees, British, French, and Dutch, creoles and half-breeds; everywhere he had his commercial relations, men on whose necks he had once laid the knife, or with whom he had helped to make sugar go smash; at least they knew with whom they had the honour. In front of them he pulled two bits of asphalt out of a lace handkerchief. Look, what asphalt, black and glossy like the pupil of your eye. Thousands, hundreds of thousands of tons, a whole lake. Millions can be made out of it. So, well, will you join me?

They scratched their hair, and sighed. Bad times, Mr. Kettelring; think of it, even asphalt's no good now; they're sacking men in Trinidad, they say It seemed as if when they lost faith in sugar, all their faith in anything was shaken. No, no, sir, nothing can be done; not a penny, not a cent will I put again in those damned

islands. (What a grand invention are colonies! To discover countries which aren't a home for a man, but only land for exploitation! How it must give scope for commercial ability!)

Kettelring dragged himself in the boat from one port to the other. During the day he slept, and at night he stood in the bows like a post, they could have tied a cable to him. That huge, blue-black night, shot with lightning, blazing with stars; the soughing sea, phosphorescent, sparkling, black like anthracite; all asphalt, sir, milliards and milliards of tons, millions could be made from it. The boat dragged itself, jerked, quivered as if it couldn't move from the spot; perhaps the propeller was turning in something thick and oily that stuck to its blades; it was dark like heavy black naphtha; and the black boat slowly made its way through the asphalt lake which closed behind it like batter. Good night, señor. There above . . . that was the milky way similar to the path in the night, the light path among the purple bougainvilleas, and the blue grapes of petrea. What a scent, what a scent it had of heavy roses, and jasmine; Kettelring pressed to his lips a little creased lace handkerchief; it smelt of asphalt, and of something immensely remote. I shall come back, Mary, I shall come back!

And all shook their heads doubtfully. We can do nothing, Mr. Kettelring, no credit anywhere, no interest in anything; on Dominica they've also stopped extracting asphalt; but if you waited twenty years, that would be something different; these blasted times can't last for ever.

Now there was only one thing left, go to those gentry from the Trinidad Lake Asphalt Company; on Trinidad the funicular was still creaking, which took barrels of asphalt from the lake straight into the boats, but even it creaked rather rustily. Those gentlemen let him stand like a suppliant while with a perspiring forehead he unwrapped his two bits of asphalt from out of the lace handkerchief; they wouldn't even look at them. What can we do with it, Mr. . . . Mr. . . . you said Cattlering, didn't you? We've got enough asphalt here for at least fifty years, and we can cope quite easily with the world consumption. There's so much money invested here—why should we develop another deposit?

But my asphalt is better; it's not got as much water in it, or clay—and a thick naphtha comes up there.

They laughed at him. Worse and worse, Mr. . . . Mr. Cattle. Couldn't you, say, flood it with water, so that it disappears for good? In that case we might buy

it, perhaps—of course, for the current price of land on Haiti. Good-bye, Mr. Kling.

(Good-bye, good-bye! At last I'm out of it, and I feel a good deal easier; I didn't feel at home in that world of business transactions, it was stranger to me than a swamp with alligators, but what of it, I found myself in it as if I were in a forest. And I was losing Kettelring in it; well, and now we've found ourselves again. You know, even he will find himself again; nobody comes to himself so intensely as one who is unhappy. Praise be to God, now we're at home, and this is MY return; this man with empty hands, who stands for nothing else but a man who has lived.)

That evening Case X sat in a room of a hotel for half-breeds at Port of Spain, full of bed-bugs, and pestering flies: through the thin walls he could hear how someone was talking and complaining in his dream, and a sailor embracing a mulatto; the whole hotel resounded with the clatter of plates, drunken brawls, guffaws, with hot snoring, and wheezing as if somebody were dying.

Case X put into the typewriter a sheet of paper bearing the imprint of the Haiti Lake Asphalt Works, and began to tap out slowly: 'Dear Miss Mary.'

No, it was impossible to write this letter on a type-

writer. Kettelring sat hunched over the sheet of paper, and sucked the pencil. It is desperately difficult to begin when for such a long time, when we have, as far as one's memory goes, never written anything like this, making and joining the letters according to some infinitely refined laws and customs. On the typewriter it would be easier to write, it wouldn't hurt so much, it wouldn't swim in front of one's eyes. Kettelring was screwing up his back like a tiny scholar writing out his first effort. Oh—oh—ho—o—oh, gasped the mulatto behind the wall, and somebody was suffocating with nightmare, as if his last hour had come.

Dear, dearest, my only one, this is my first and last letter. I promised to come back, to come back like a man who has a name, and property; now I have nothing, I am shipwrecked, and I am going away. Where? I don't know yet. This life of mine is at an end, and I have had enough not to begin again. The only thing that is certain is that there is no longer a Kettelring, and that it would be useless to remember now who he really was. If I knew of a place in this world where it would be possible to live without a name I should go there; but even to beg one must have a name.

My only love, what madness it is that I still call you my love, and say you are mine. Now you will know

that I am not coming back; but you must also know that I still love you as I did the first day, indeed infinitely more, for the more I have suffered the more I have loved you.

Kettelring grew thoughtful. Who knows if she is still waiting. It's three years since I went away; perhaps she's married to a Yankee in white shoes . . . Well, let her be happy.

I don't know, if I really believe in God, but I clasp my hands, and I pray that you will be happy. There must be a wise God if only because he did not bind up your fate with mine. Good-bye, good-bye, we shall not see each other again.

Kettelring had to bend right over the paper because he couldn't see, and he quickly scrawled his signature. At that instant he stiffened as if something had struck him on the head. He didn't sign his name George Kettelring. Unable to see for tears, blindly, unconsciously he wrote the real name which for so many years had escaped his memory."

"HE couldn't stand it in the hotel, he had to go out into the night; he sat by the harbour on a pile of sleepers guarded by a negro policeman; and, leaning with his elbows on his knees, he gazed into the black rippling water. Now he knew everything, and he needn't try to remember; he tidied it up inside himself as if straightening up a pack of cards, and he turned over this and that. Yes, it's there, and nothing is missing. Such a queer feeling—was it relief, or was he painfully overwhelmed?

Let us say home. A home without a mother, big rooms with heavy curtains, and black respectable furniture. Father who had no time for the child, big, strange, and severe. A timid anxious aunt. Mind, baby don't sit down there, don't put it in your mouth, you mustn't play with dirty children. A red and green ball, the most treasured toy because it was stolen in the street from a bawling urchin, one of those lucky ones who could run about with dirty noses, and bare feet, and make mud pies, or sit squatting in the sand. The former Mr. Kettelring smiled, and his eyes glinted. So you see, aunt, and yet in the end I did run about

barefoot, and dirty like a coal-heaver. I have eaten chuchu cucumbers which a negress had wiped with her dirty skirt, and unripe guavas picked up from the dust of the road. The late Kettelring had almost a feeling of sated revenge. After all, I did do as I liked.

And now the restless boy whose natural wildness had been suppressed by so-called education. He began to understand the craft of his father. That craft was wealth. That craft was factories, to force the greatest possible number of people to work as hard as possible, and as cheap as possible. The boy saw those crowds of workers who streamed out from the gates of the factories with their peculiar sour smell, and he had a feeling that they all hated him. The father used to shout and give orders; God knows what vexation it costs to win such a fortune. You'd think that it isn't worth the bother; but no matter, property isn't just dead material, it wants its grub so that it doesn't peg out, and it must be fed properly. You, my boy, one day this property will be entrusted to you, not to have it, but to add to it; therefore learn to save, and get down to it if one day you are going to make others sweat and make ends meet. I'm bringing you up for a practical life; I'm bringing you up for my property. The former Kettelring grinned broadly. So that's where it comes from,

from my father, that I can order people about and make them slave; well, some inheritance at any rate. Then, yes, at that time the young boy didn't care for it; he was rather easygoing and lazy—perhaps that was only out of spite against something that had already been fixed as his future. We're not here for our own sakes, but to serve property; who doesn't serve his own will slave for a stranger—something like that is the law of life. And you, my boy, will follow in my footsteps.

The former Kettelring shook with silent laughter. No, certainly he hadn't followed in them. He was only a heir-apparent, who was waiting one day to give it a turn. And just on purpose—bad society, and such like things. Debts, of course, silly, it's true, and not particularly honourable. Father quivered with agitation and made inquiries. What does it mean, why have you spent it, and such like things? You rascal, do you imagine that I slave for that, earn and save my money to pay for your infamies? And then it broke out in the stripling—of course, only spite, only waywardness, only such a passionate temper; with clenched fists he stormed at his father: 'Keep your money, stick it down your throat, I don't want it; I spit on it, I loathe it; don't think that I shall be such a slave to money as

you are!' Father became purple, strange that he didn't have a stroke; he showed him the door, and hissed: 'Get out!' Then the door banged, that was the end, exit the son.

The former Mr. Kettelring shook his head. God, such a stupid thing! As if there were only a few thunderstorms like that in a family, may the devil take them. But that time two particularly tough and obstinate people fell foul of each other. The stripling never returned, and didn't even present himself when father's legal adviser invited him to see him; in the end the respectable legal friend found the prodigal son in bed with a theoretical and practical anarchist; and because the young gentleman made no move, he had to explain to him his mission in that shocking situation. He managed it quite nicely; on one side he put on a reprimanding frown, and on the other he beamed with tactful and mild good will, for youth must sow its wild oats, particularly the youth of so promising an heir. 'Your father wishes me to tell you that he doesn't want to see you till you have come to reason, my young friend,' he said heartily. 'I have no doubt that you will try, and that you will succeed, haha, isn't that so? Between us,' he said, with his head bent piously to one side, 'the property (he very nearly said Mr. Property) of

your father is now put at thirty, thirty-five millions, young man, such a property is no joking matter.' At that moment he really did look immensely solemn and serious, but he cheered up again. 'Your father asked me to tell you that through me he is willing to make you a certain allowance until you come of age.' And he named a sum almost miserable—the old miser kept faith with himself even in his righteous anger. 'Of course, if after that you don't see reason—' the solicitor gave his shoulders an eloquent shrug. 'But I hope that it will be a healthy and hard school of life for you.'

'Well, give me the dibs,' replied the heir of thirty millions, 'and tell the old man that I wish him a real long life while he's waiting for me.'

The anarchist clapped her hands enthusiastically.

The respectable solicitor playfully shook his fat finger at her. 'You, you, don't you turn our young friend's head. Let him enjoy himself, that's all right, but nothing more, do you understand?'

The girl stuck her tongue out at him; but the benevolent solicitor beamed and warmly pressed the hand of the prodigal son. 'My dear, dear friend,' he said touchingly, 'we shall all look forward to your speedy return.'

The prodigal son was eighteen then; until his coming

of age he roamed about as is the way of young people, that is, he himself wouldn't be able to say how, and to whom he chiefly owed the money for it. Of course: Paris, Marseilles, Algiers, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Seville, Madrid, and back again to Paris. As far as he was aware, with the breaking-up of the family his father had lost all his inner inhibitions and plunged pathologically into making money, and into miserable senile stinginess. God bless him, it will be a pile of money that grows up there! Exactly on the day when he came of age the miserable pittance stopped. The prodigal son became furious: 'Do you expect me to crawl back on my knees? Not on your life!'—He tried to work; but strange, not until he began to work did want and misery oppress him, and when he tried to return to his former easy way of life, it wasn't the same any longer, he already carried some mark that made him suspicious of poverty. Then he took to a girl who was ill and had lost her job. He was sorry for her, and wanted to help her; he wrote to his father's legal friend that circumstances had arisen in which for a short time he needed a couple of thousand francs. He got to the centime as much as the journey cost from Paris third class, and with it a letter that his father was willing to pardon him if he showed that he wanted to work

sensibly at home, and so on. It was really only then that he clenched his teeth, with no blithe swagger any longer, and he said to himself: 'I'd rather peg out with hunger.'

The former Mr. Kettelring, sitting on the beams at Port of Spain in Trinidad, almost grew frightened. He said it aloud as he had done then, but now he shook his head."

CHAPTER XXXVI

"THE former Ketterling saw it now in an astonishingly clear light: If he had been genuinely and honestly poor, he would certainly have settled down somewhere; he had not lacked opportunities. Perhaps a book-keeper in Casa Blanca, or in Marseilles as a commercial traveller

mother-of-pearl buttons. But just realize, if you please, that I'm actually heir to thirty, forty, fifty millions, or as many as the old fellow has sucked up in the meantime; how am I to have the patience or resignation to argue with a blustering vulgar market dealer over the sale of twenty dozen buttons? At times he was seized with the absurdity of his position, he couldn't take it seriously, he wasn't up to haggling with a sweaty and eager face for a couple of francs or pesetas; suddenly it was clear in his eyes that he was only playing at it, or something—people were offended, and from time to time he himself let off steam with an escapade so provocative that nothing was left but to change his post as quickly as possible. The former Mr. Kettelring remembered it with a certain relish. I didn't make it clear for you, you boobies, and perhaps even to-day your mugs are bitter and dry with rage

when you remember that impudent bounder who treated you in this and that with so much disrespect, and then—Good-bye, please lick my shoes.

But on meditating over it—after all it was so half-unreal, and no matter what he did, he couldn't get rid of the feeling that in some way it was only provisory, and didn't really happen, but only as a matter of chance, and tentatively. The only thing real was that spite which led him on through thick and thin, and especially the thin; even in the utmost misery those millions were within his reach, easy to grasp, if only he had wished to end it all. Well, he could let them tinkle in his pocket when he took a stroll in the street, an individual without domicile, or employment, his eyes could smile maliciously at all people who got out of the way of a suspicious-looking tramp, if only they knew who he was! Millions in his pocket, and he wouldn't even buy with them a glass of beer. Five coppers in your pocket, and you can buy a red rose. It was in fact a perpetual occasion for jeering occupation; he mustn't forget the wild delight with which he first began to beg; it was on the Rambla in Barcelona amidst swarms of sparrows —how that old lady, with a rosary round her hand, looked terrified at the fellow baring his teeth, 'Por Dios misericordia, señora'.

The former Mr. Kettelring rubbed his forehead. No, I couldn't have borne it if it had been—real; but it was, you know, a kind of game with the unreal. As if I were trying to see how long I could stand it before I stretched out my hand, and begin to cry for help. The thrilling agony of standing on the side of the pavement and looking hungrily at the most beautiful and splendid women—only to say the word, and you would be mine, but now, of course, you won't even look at me, you beasts. That beautiful rage, that liberating scorn of everything. Yes, of course, of what is called morals as well; for there are the virtues of the poor, and the virtues of the wealthy, but there are no morals for the lousy ones who don't want to get rich. And they don't let themselves become attached to one place, the rascals. Not speaking of the ties of family, and customs, it is property and being dependent that makes one settle, and a man who doesn't mind misery, or care for money, is like a balloon without anchoring ropes, and ballast, and he is led where God permits and the devil blows. Yes, wandering is certainly madness, it is a derangement of the property centres, something like losing one's sense of stability. And so reel about, you fool, if you can't help it——

Wait, there's something there that ought to be looked

into. No, it was just mooncalf stupidity. In fact, no—well, say silliness. At the time I was something on a boat, that was in Plymouth; in the evening we used to sit on the Hoe, under the striped lighthouse, with a girl from Barbican. Such a thin, tiny English woman—she was seventeen. She held my hand, and tried to point out the good way of life to a big, rotten sailor. The former Mr. Kettelring's teeth chattered. But that was almost like . . . like . . . when Mary, Maria Dolores, held my hand, and wanted to bring me to myself! O God, there are signs in life that we don't understand. The former sailor gazed aghast into the black water, but he saw a blue, transparent evening on the Hoe, the red and green lights of the buoys, and the distance, Christ, that nice, even distance. She held my hand, and whispered quickly, 'Promise me, promise me, that you'll be good—and that sometime you'll settle here.' She worked in some kind of a factory. To tell her about those millions within my reach, wouldn't it have been like the Thousand and One Nights? It had been on the tip of his tongue, but he swallowed it somehow in a hurry and with too much effort. She kissed him good-bye furtively and clumsily, and he said, 'I shall come back.'

That boat went to the West Indies, and he had never gone back.

So, and now he was there, having arrived in good health, and that was all—No, that wasn't all, prompts some severe and undeviating voice. Do remember what followed—Well, what would follow; I ran away from the boat, that was there on Trinidad, just there at Port of Spain, wasn't it?—Yes, and what next, what came after that?

Then I went downhill; when once a man begins to go downhill, it's too late to stop. How far down? Out with it—Well, I was a docker in the harbour, and a tallyman who ran about with papers in his hands—and nothing further? I was an overseer over the negroes at the asphalt lake to see that they didn't even wipe off the sweat with the back of their hands—And there was something else, wasn't there? Yes, I was a waiter on Guadelope, and in Matanzas, and I served mulattos with cocktails and ice.

And nothing worse than that?

The former Mr. Kettelring covered his face with his hot hands, and sighed. Let it be, there was something to say for it. It was revenge, it was revenge that they let me fall so low. To make it clear, I gloated over my abasement. You beasts, you beasts, here you have it, stick your millions down your throats; all of you look what the only son and heir of a millionaire looks like!

Yes, let's look into it.

Yes, look into it: he was being kept by a mulatto; so now you know. He loved her passionately, and touted for her among the drunken fellows, for the most perverse of them all, and he waited outside for his share.

So that's how it was—The former Kettelring's head fell low on his chest. In the café a Yankee was sitting, and I grinned idiotically: 'Can I, Sir, take you to a beautiful girl—beautiful—' the American turned crimson, and sprang up, perhaps he couldn't bear this ignominy of the white man; then he struck me in the face, on this cheek—A red spot appeared on the former Kettelring's face—He threw on the floor a creased five-dollar note, while they pushed me into the street. I came back for those five dollars, and I crawled on the ground like a dog.

The former Kettelring raised his horrified eyes. Will such a thing ever be forgotten?

Perhaps in the end, try, try to forget.

Yes, I drank like a beast, and yet I couldn't forget; I reeled, and I didn't know where and which way—along the path like the milky way, between the bougainvilleas in flower.

Yes, yes, there; I heard a revolver bark, and somebody ran and knocked into me. And then, then, at last, I forgot it all."

C H A P T E R   X X X V I I

"THE former Kettelring sighed with relief. So—now it's all out, and do what you like, you can't make it any worse. And see here, even when I crawled on all fours like a dog I didn't give in, it didn't cry inside me. Enough, I'm giving up, and this is my return, begging for pardon, my homecoming. I only drank, and howled over my degradation. It was . . . in fact . . . some sort of a victory.

And you will give in.

Yes, now I will give in, and gladly, God, how gladly ! If they wanted me to spit into my face, or crawl again on all fours, I'll do it. I know why. It's for her, for the Cuban's daughter.

Or for getting the better of old Camagueyno.

Shut up, it's a lie. For her sake it is. Didn't I tell her that I should come back, didn't I give her my word of honour?

Your word of honour, pimp, pimp !

Yes, and perhaps even a pimp; if only I knew who I am. What do you want, a man is complete only when he is defeated. Then he realizes, that it is unmistakable and real, that it is an undeviating reality.

The defeat.

Yes, the defeat. It is an immense relief to be able to give in; to put your hands on your breast, and give in—

To what?

To love. To love, in defeat and humiliation—a man knows then what love is. You are no longer a hero, but an insulted and battered pimp; you have crawled on the ground like a beast, and yet you will be dressed in the most beautiful garment and a ring will be put on your finger. That is the miracle. I know, I know that she is waiting for me; and now I can go to her. Christ, I am happy!

Happy, really?

Immensely happy, it freezes me—feel, feel how my cheeks burn.

Only the left cheek. That's the blow burning on it.

No, it's not a blow. Don't you know that she kissed me on that cheek? Yes, kissed, and damped it with her tears, don't you know? Everything is redeemed—as if it had cost so little pain! But what longing I had, and the hell I went through, that terrible work—was all for her.

And that blow?

—Yes, and that blow was for her, too. That the

miracle could take place. And I shall go to her: she will be waiting in the garden as she was then——

—And she will put her hand in yours.

For God's sake, don't mention her hand! One says hand, and already my fingers and chin tremble. How she took me then by the hand—I am thinking of her smooth fingers, stop! stop!

Are you immensely happy?

Yes, no, wait, it will pass. Damn these tears! How is it possible that a man can love someone so absurdly! If she were waiting for me there—there at that crane, I should be horrified. God, how far, when shall I reach her! And if I held her by the hands, by the arms—God, how far!

• Are you happy, then?

Nonsense, don't you see that I may go mad! When shall I see her? First I must go home, mustn't I? I must bow my head and beg for pardon. I must stand for a name and a man; and then again over the sea. No, but that's impossible; I shall not be able to endure it, it's impossible, such a time!

That you would go first to her, and tell her——?

No, I can't do that, I mustn't, that's not right. I told her that I shouldn't come for her until I had a right to. I mustn't disappoint her. I must go home,

first go home, and only then—I shall knock at that gate as one who has a right to knock. Open, I am coming for her.

The black policeman who for a long time had been watching the man talking to himself and waving his arms about, drew nearer. Eh, sir!

The former Kettelring raised his eyes. ‘Do you understand,’ he said quickly. ‘First I must go home. I don’t know whether my father is still alive, but if he is, God knows, I will kiss his hand, and say, bless, father, bless, thy prodigal son who was glad to eat the husks thrown to the sows. I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. And he, the old miser, will be pleased, and will say: This son of mine was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. So it’s written, brother, in the Scriptures.’

‘Amen,’ said the policeman, and wanted to go away.

‘But wait, that means, doesn’t it, that the prodigal son will be pardoned? His profligacy will be pardoned, and his piggish hunger, and that blow will be wiped away. Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand.’ The former Kettelring got up, and tears were flowing from the eyes. ‘But I can only guess that my father is alive, and is waiting for

me in his old age to make out of me a rich man and a miser as he was himself. You don't know, you don't know what the prodigal son gave up. You don't know what he sacrificed—But no, she is waiting; I will come; Mary, I will come back, but first I must go home.'

'I will take you, sir,' said the black policeman. 'Where are you going?' 'There,' and with his hand he pointed across the sky, to the horizon where silent lightning flashed.

I am obsessed by the idea that he did not return by boat; travel by boat is too tedious and soothing, its tempo is not brisk enough. I went to the air companies to inquire if there is a connection by aeroplane to Trinidad. It seems that there is a regular air line from Europe to Natal, and from there to Para; but they could not tell me if there is any further connection by air from Para to Trinidad, or to any other place in the Antilles. It is possible, and I assume on no other grounds that Case X chose this quicker route. He had to choose it because in the end we have seen him fall head first, enveloped in the flames, to reach the end of his journey, like a meteor, with the most terrible speed. He had to fly with his impatient eyes fixed on the horizon; the pilot sitting motionless as if he were asleep. Oh, to

give him a whack on the back of his head to wake him up and make him fly faster. And from one aeroplane into another, deafened and dulled by the roar of the engines, only conscious of one thing, of the haste. At the last aerodrome, almost within sight of home, that rattling train of speed suddenly stopped short. They could not fly, there was a storm. He raged with foam at his lips. You call this a storm? You dogs, you mangy dogs, if you knew what the hurricanes down there are like! Alright, then a private aeroplane, whatever it costs; and once more that convulsive, mad agony of impatience, clenched fists, and teeth set into the lace handkerchief—then the end: whirling, flames, the smell of naphtha, and the black lake of unconsciousness which closed thickly round him.

Dear doctor, I should like to pay you the honour, and sketch you, your honest and broad shoulders bent over the dead body of Case X. I saw you by the bed, and yet I can't visualize you very well. Please don't object if once more I break away from plain reality. I shall place by his bed that hairy, not very agreeable fellow; he holds the patient by the wrist, and bends attentively his cocksure, bristly pate. The pretty nurse can rest her eyes on those blond feathers, for she is up to her ears in love with the young doctor.

Ah, to run through them with my fingers, and tear,  
comb them through, gently like breath—The young  
fellow raises his head. ‘I can’t feel his pulse. Fetch the  
screen, sister.’ ”

C H A P T E R   X X X V I I I

THE surgeon finished the manuscript, and mechanically he straightened it up so that no page was out of place.

The old specialist came to see him. "It's a pity you didn't come and have a look at the post-mortem. An interesting case. That man had gone through a lot—I should like you to see his heart."

"Big?"

"Big. Do you know that they've already got some information? A telegraph from Paris. It was a private aeroplane."

The surgeon raised his eyes. "Well, and?"

"I don't know his name, the name came muddled; but he was entered as a Cuban."

